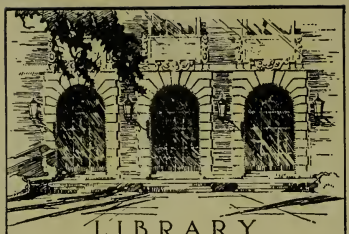

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BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE QUEEN OF CONNAUGHT," "TWO MEN AND A MAID," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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MY CONNAUGHT COUSINS.

CHAPTER I.

IN order to see all that there was to be seen in Storport, I one evening accepted Shawn's invitation to go with the boys to the herring-fishing. We started at sunset, and were out all night; but as soon as the work was over, and the faint glimmering of dawn appeared in the east, we turned our boat's bow towards the shore, and pulled swiftly

homewards. There lay the group of curraghs, still upon the scene of their labour, loaded with phosphorescent fish and dripping nets, and manned with crews of shivering, weary men. The sea, which during the night had been throbbing convulsively, was calm and bright as a polished mirror, while the grey cliffs were faintly shadowed forth by the lustrous light of the moon.

Wearied with my night's labour, I lay listlessly in the stern of the boat, listening dreamily to the measured splash, splash of the oars, and drinking in the beauty of the scene around me—the placid sea, the black outline of the hills and cliffs, the silently sleeping village of Storport. Presently, however, my ears detected another sound, which came faintly across the water, and mingled softly with the monotonous splash-

ing of the oars and the weary washing of the sea. "Is it a mermaid singing?" I asked sleepily; "the village maidens are all dreaming of their lovers at this hour, but the Midian Maras sing of theirs. Oh, yes; it must be a mermaid! For hark! the sound is issuing from the shore yonder, and surely no human being ever possessed a voice half so beautiful."

To my question no one vouchsafed a reply, so I lay still half dozing, and listened to the plaintive wailing of the voice, which every moment grew stronger. It came across the water like the low sweet sound of an Æolian harp touched by the summer breeze; and, as the boat glided swiftly on, bringing it ever nearer, the whole scene around seemed suddenly to brighten, as if from the touch of a magical

hand. Above me sailed the moon, scattering pale vitreous light around her, and touching with her cool white hand the yellow thatched cabins, lying so secluded on the hill-side, the long stretch of shimmering sand, the fringe of foam upon the shingle, the peaks of the hills which stood *silhouetted* against the pale grey sky. A white owl passing across the boat, and almost brushing my cheek with its wing, aroused me at length from my torpor. The sound of the voice had ceased. Above my head a flock of seagulls screamed, and, as they sailed away, I heard the whistle of the curlew ; little puffins were floating thick as bees around us, wild rock-doves flew swiftly from the caverns, and beyond again the cormorants blackened the weed-covered rocks. The splash of our oars had for a moment

created a commotion; presently all calmed down again, and again I heard the plaintive wailing of the mermaid's song. The voice, more musical than ever, was at length so distinct as to bring with it the words of the ditty:—

"My Owen Bawn's hair is of thread gold spun;
Of gold in the shadow, of light in the sun;
All curled in a coolun the bright tresses are,
They make his head radiant with beams like a star.

My Owen Bawn's mantle is long and is wide,
To wrap me up safe from the storm by his side;
And I'd rather face snowdrift, and winter wind there,
Than be among daisies and sunshine elsewhere.

My Owen Bawn Con is a bold fisherman,
He spears the strong salmon in midst of the Bann;
And, rocked in the tempest, on stormy Lough Neagh,
Draws up the red trout through the bursting spray."

The voice suddenly ceased, and as it did so, I saw that the singer was a young girl, who, with her hands clasped behind her,

and her face turned to the moonlit sky, walked slowly along the shore. Suddenly she paused, and while the sea kissed her bare feet, and the moon laid tremulous hands upon her head, began to sing again :—

"I have called my love, but he still sleeps on,
And his lips are as cold as clay ;
I have kissed them o'er and o'er again ;
I have pressed his cheek with my burning brow,
And I've watched o'er him all the day ;
Is it then true that no more thou'lt smile
On Moina ?
Art thou then lost to thy Moina ?

I once had a lamb my love gave me,
As the mountain snow 'twas white ;
Oh, how I loved it, nobody knows ;
I decked it each morn with the myrtle rose,
With "forget-me-nots" at night ;
My lover they slew, and they tore my lamb
From Moina !
They pierced the heart's core of poor Moina !"

As the last words fell from her tremu-

lous lips, and the echoes of the sweet voice faded far away across the sea, the boat gliding gently in, ran her bow into the sand, and I, leaping out, came suddenly face to face with the loveliest vision I had ever beheld. "Is it a mermaid?" I asked myself again, for surely, I thought, no human being could be half so lovely. I saw a pale Madonna-like face, set in a wealth of golden hair, on which the moonlight brightened and darkened like the shadows on a wind-swept sea. Large lustrous eyes, which gazed earnestly seaward, then filled with a strange wandering far-off look, as they turned to my face. A young girl, clad in a peasant's dress, with her bare feet washed reverently by the sighing sea; her half-parted lips kissed by the breeze which travelled

slowly shoreward; her cheeks and neck were pale as alabaster, so were the little hands, which were still clasped half nervously behind her; and as she stood, with her eyes wandering restlessly, first to my face, then to the dim line of the horizon, the moon, brightening with sudden splendour, wrapt her from head to foot in a mantle of shimmering snow. For a moment she stood gazing with a peculiar far-away look into my face; then, with a sigh, she turned away, and, with her face still turned oceanward, her hands still clasped behind her, wandered slowly along the moonlit sands. As she went, fading like a spirit amid the shadows, I heard again the low sweet sound of the plaintive voice which had come to me across the ocean, but soon it grew fainter and

fainter, until only the echoes were heard. I turned to my boatman, who now stood waiting for me to depart.

"Well, Shawn, is it a mermaid?" I asked, smiling. He gravely shook his head.

"No, yer honor; 'tis only a poor colleen wid a broken heart!"

I turned and looked questioningly at him, but he was gazing at the spot whence the figure of the girl had disappeared.

"God Almighty, risht the dead!" he said reverently, raising his hat, "but him that brought such luck to Mary O'Connell deserved his curse, God knows!"

This incident, coupled with the strange manner of my man, interested me, and I began to question him as to the story of

the girl, whose lovely face was still vividly before me. But for some reason or other, he seemed to shun the subject, so I too held my peace, and we walked on in silence to the Lodge.

It was only about four o'clock in the morning, so, of course, we found the Lodge as quiet as a tomb, and everybody fast asleep. We entered noiselessly by the back way. Shawn remained in the kitchen, I went on to the dining-room. My supper was laid on the table; in the grate were a few smouldering sods of turf, which when knocked together, blazed out into a roaring fire. I lifted the kettle which stood simmering upon the hob, and placed it on the blaze, when it boiled, I mixed two stiff glasses of grog, and called in Shawn to keep me company.

"Now, Shawn," I said, holding forth a steaming goblet which made his eyes sparkle like two stars, "close the door, draw your chair up to the fire, drink off this, and tell me the story of the lovely colleen whom we saw to-night."

"Would yer honor really like to hear?"

"I would; it will give me something to dream about, and prevent me from thinking too much of her pretty face."

Shawn smiled gravely.

"Yer honor thinks her pretty? Well, then, ye'll believe me when I tell ye that, if ye was to search the counthry at the present moment, ye couldn't find a colleen to match Mary O'Connell. When she was born, the neighbours thought she must be a fairy child, she was so pretty, and small, and white; and when she got older, there wasn't a boy

in Storport but would lay down his life for her. Boys wid fortunes, and boys widout fortunes, tried to get her, and, begging yer honor's pardon, I went myself in wid the rest. But it went one way wid us all. Mary just smiled, and said she did not want to marry. But one day, two years ago now come this Serapht, that lazy shaughraun, Miles Doughty (God rest his soul!) came over from Ballygally, and going straight to Mary, without making up any match at all, asked her to marry him!"

"Well?"

"Well, yer honor, this time Mary brightened up, and though she knew well enough that Miles was a dirty blackguard, without a penny in the world—though the old people said no, and there was plenty fortunes in Storport waitin' on her — she just went

against every one of them, and said she must marry Miles. The old people pulled against her at first, but at last Mary, with her smiles and pretty ways, won over Father John, who won over the old people, till at last they said that if Miles would go for a while to the black pits of Pennsylvania, and earn the money to buy a house and a bit of land, he should marry her!"

He paused, and for a time there was silence. Shawn looked thoughtfully into the fire; I lay back in my easy-chair, and carelessly watched the smoke which curled from my cigar, and as I did so I seemed to hear again the wildly plaintive voice of the girl as I had heard it before that night,—

> "I have called my love, but he still sleeps on,
> And his lips are as cold as clay!"

and as the words of the song passed through

my mind, they seemed to tell me the sequel of the story.

"Another case of disastrous true love," I said, turning to Shawn; and when he looked puzzled, I added,—"He died, and she is mourning him?"

"Yes, yer honor, he died; but if that was all he did, we would forgive him. What broke the poor colleen's heart was that he should forget her when he got to the strange land, and marry another colleen at the time he should have married *her*. After that it was but right that he should die!"

"Did he write and tell her he was married?"

"Write? Devil the bit, nor to tell he was dead neither! Here was the poor colleen watching and waiting for him for two whole years, and wondering what could

keep him; but a few months ago, Owen Magrath, a boy who had gone away from the village long ago on account of Mary refusing to marry him, came back again, and told Mary that Miles was dead, and asked her to marry him. He had made lots of money, and was ready to take a house and a bit of land, and to buy up cattle, if she would but say the word to him."

"Well?"

"Well, yer honor, Mary just shook her head, and said that now Miles was dead 'twas as well for her to die too. At this Owen spoke out, and asked where was the use of grieving so, since for many months before his death Miles had been a married man! Well, when Owen said this Mary never spoke a single word, but her teeth set, and her lips and face went white and

cold as clay, and ever since that day she has been so strange in her ways that some think she's not right at all. On moonlight nights she creeps out of the house and walks by the sea singing them strange old songs, then she looks out as if expecting him to come to her, and, right or wrong, she'll never look at another man!"

As Shawn finished, the hall clock chimed five, the last spark faded from my cigar, the turf fell low in the grate, so I went to bed to think over the story alone.

. . . . . .

During the three days which followed this midnight adventure, Storport was visited by a deluge of rain, but on the fourth morning I looked from my window to find the earth basking in summer sunshine. The sky was a vault of throbbing

blue, flecked here and there with waves of summer cloud, the stretches of sand grew golden in the sun-rays, while the hills were glistening bright as if from the smiling sky. The sight revivified me, and, as soon as my breakfast was over, I whistled up my dogs and strolled out into the air. How bright and beautiful everything looked after the heavy rain! The ground was spongy to the tread, the dew still lay heavily upon the heather and long grass; but the sun seemed to be sucking up golden beams from the bog. Everybody seemed to be out that day, and most people were busy. Old men drove heavily laden donkeys along the muddy road, young girls carried their creels of turf across the bog, and by the roadside, close to where I stood, the turf-cutters were busy. I paused for a while

and watched them at their work, and when I turned to go, I saw for the first time that I had not been alone. Not many yards from me stood a figure watching the turf-cutters too. A young man dressed like a grotesque figure for a pantomime, with high boots, felt hat cocked rakishly over one eye, and a vest composed of all the colours of the rainbow. His big brown fingers were profusely bedecked with brass and steel rings, a massive brass chain swung from his waistcoat, and an equally showy pin adorned the scarf at his throat.

When the turf-cutters, pausing suddenly in their work, gazed at him with wonder in their eyes, he gave a peculiar smile, and asked, with a strong Yankee accent, if they could tell him where one Mary O'Connell lived; he was a stranger here,

and brought her news from the States. In a moment a dozen fingers were outstretched to point him on, and the stranger, again smiling to himself, swaggered away. I stood for a time and watched him go, then I, too, sauntered on. I turned off from the road, crossed the bog, and made direct for the sea-shore.

I had been walking there for some quarter of an hour, when suddenly a shadow was flung across my path, and looking up, I again beheld the stranger. His hat was pushed back now, and I saw for the first time that his face was handsome. His cheeks were bronzed and weather-beaten, but his features were finely formed, and on his head clustered a mass of curling, chesnut hair. He was flushed as if with excitement; he

cast a hurried glance about him, and disappeared.

Five minutes later, as I still stood wondering at the strange behaviour of the man, my ears were greeted with a shriek which pierced to my very heart. Running in the direction whence the sound proceeded, I reached the top of a neighbouring sandhill, and gazing into the valley below me, I again beheld the stranger. This time his head was bare, his arms were outstretched, and he held upon his breast the half-fainting form of the lovely girl whom I had last beheld in the moonlight. While I stood hesitating as to the utility of descending, I saw the girl gently withdraw herself from his arms, then clasping her hands around his neck, fall sobbing on his breast.

"Well, Shawn, what's the news?" I asked that night, when Shawn rushed excitedly into my room. For a time he could tell me nothing, but by dint of a few well-applied questions I soon extracted from him the whole story. It amounted to this,—that after working for two years like a galley-slave in the black pits of Pennsylvania, with nothing but the thought of Mary to help him on, Miles Doughty found himself with enough money to warrant his coming home; that he was about to return to Storport, when, unfortunately, the day before his intended departure a shaft in the coal-pit fell upon him, and he was left for dead; that for many months he lay ill, but as soon as he was fit to travel he started for home. Arrived in Storport, he was astonished to find that

no one recognised him, and he was about to pass himself off as a complete stranger, when the news of his reported death and Mary's sorrow so shocked him that he determined to make himself known at once.

"And God help the villain that told her he was married," concluded Shawn, "for he swears he'll kill him as soon as Mary—God bless her!—comes out o' the fever that's she's in to-night!"

Shortly after that night I found myself sitting with Oona and Aileen in the hut where Mary O'Connell dwelt. The cabin was illuminated so brightly that it looked like a spot of fire upon the bog, the rooms in the house were crowded, and without, dark figures gathered as thick as bees in swarming time. Miles Doughty, clad

rather less gaudily than when I first beheld him, moved amidst the throng with bottle and glass, pausing now and again to look affectionately at Mary, who, decorated with her bridal flowers, was dancing with one of the "straw men" who had come to do honour to her marriage-feast. When the dance was ended, she came over and stood beside me.

"Mary," I whispered, "do you remember that night when I heard you singing songs upon the sand?"

Her face flushed brightly, then it grew grave, and finally her eyes filled with tears.

"My dear," I added, "I never meant to pain you. I only want you to sing a sequel to those songs to-night."

She laughed lightly, then she spoke

rapidly in Irish, and merrily sang the well-known lines,—

> "Oh, the marriage, the marriage,
> With love and mo bouchal for me;
> The ladies that ride in a carriage
> Might envy my marriage to me."

Then she was laughingly carried off to join in another dance.

We joined in the fun till midnight, then, though the merriment was still at its height, we quietly left the cabin, and walked back to the Lodge.

"Cousin Jack," said Biddy, after we had recounted our evening's adventure to the girls at home, and were about to retire for the night, "are you tired of this sort of thing?"

"Not at all. Why?"

"Because I should like to take *my* day

to-morrow, and show you how real matrimonial matches are made in Connaught. May I?"

I assented, and cordially agreed to place myself on the following day at Bridget's sole disposal.

CHAPTER II.

"YE'LL just throw in another heifer, and we'll settle the matter at onst."

"Another heifer! Troth, thin, I never will. Don't ye know already that Norah has the biggest fortune of any girl in Storport? There's five cows, four milch cows, and one in calf; and two fat pigs ready for rent day; a strong donkey for drawing turf, and three pounds in gold."

"And if she has, what is it? Hasn't my boy got a good house and bit o' land,

and, forby that, a strong mule and a good cart? There's plenty fortunes in the village that's waitin' for him, believe me, so, if ye don't throw in the heifer, I'll just take myself to another house, and your Norah may wait as she is till next Serapht."

The foregoing sentences, uttered fiercely by two ragged-looking men, greeted our ears as we stepped into Patrick Macdermot's cabin, and, shaking the rain from our outer garments, made our way swiftly towards the fire.

"After all," murmured Bridget, as we took our seat upon the form, and held our hands over the flame, "I am glad we are not too late."

Though she had spent many a Shrovetide in Ireland, though she had been to dozens of match-makings, and seen hundreds of

buxom girls haggled over and finally disposed of as if they had been sheep, she had never before, she said, been so interested. For there was a novelty in this case. Sentiment had been introduced, and was likely to spoil the proceedings. Norah Macdermot had transgressed the rules which had been enforced by her people from generation to generation. Instead of living quietly, as other girls had to do, instead of closing her beautiful eyes to any little fascinations which happened to be possessed by any of the male population of Storport, and giving her ready consent to any match which her parents liked to make for her, she had actually been mad enough to fall in love, and that, too, with a good-looking shaughraun, whose position in life did not entitle him to become the possessor of her hand.

Our entrance caused a momentary cessation of the proceedings, and ere the belligerents began again, I took a glance around the room to discover who might be our companions. There in a corner, crouched beside the fire, was Norah's mother, a little, wizened old woman of sixty; her two stalwart brothers sat on the form by my side; some dozen of the neighbours were sprinkled about the floor; and yes, I could not be mistaken, a little distance behind them all, half-shrinking back into the gloom, but gazing with fixed anxiety at the speakers, was Norah herself. She looked very pretty that night. Her large dark eyes were moist with tears, her full, petulant lips were quivering, and her little delicate fingers clenched and unclenched themselves in nervous dread.

In a moment of impulse I made my way across the kitchen, sat down by the girl's side, and took her hand sympathetically in mine. She turned her face to me, and I felt that her heart was throbbing, her hands burning like fire.

"Who is the boy, Norah?" I whispered, bending towards her.

She shook her head.

"I think they say he comes from Ballygally."

"What! have you not seen him?"

"No!"

At this point the girl half-rose from her seat and fixed her anxious eyes again upon the central figures in the room. Turning, I perceived that the old woman had left her seat by the fire, and had gone to join in the discussion.

"Will ye take a small sow, Shamus Beg? Toney would make it a sow."

"I would not, then," returned her husband decidedly; and Norah sighed, relieved.

Shamus Beg picked up his hat and prepared to take his departure.

"Is that your last word, Toney Macdermot?" he asked; and Toney, sobered a little by this decisive movement, replied slowly,—

"Troth, an it is, thin, unless, indeed, ye'll take a couple of pigs out o' the litter there, and make the matter right."

Shamus walked over to the corner, and gazed meditatively at the litter of pigs which were reposing upon the straw.

"Will ye say three, Shawn Macdermot?" he asked, after a few moments' thought.

"No, I will not say three!"

"You will not? Well, would two and a couple of hens be any loss on ye?"

Toney considered, and as he did so the girl's face grew white and red by turns, her lips parted with her eager breathing. She half-stretched forth her hand again, for she saw that her mother was about to speak.

"Ye'll make it the couple o' hens and pigs, Toney, and say no more about it. Sure there isn't as good a house in Ballygally as Shamus Beg's, and forby that, there's our Biddy to be fortuned next Serapht, if Norah is out of the way. Settle it at once, and say no more."

Thus pressed, Toney relented, the two friends shook hands over their bargain, while the girl, white as any corpse, shrank further into the shade.

Business being over, pleasure began, and as pleasure in Ireland usually takes the form of a plentiful supply of whisky, it flowed in a perfect stream. The bashful swain, who had taken refuge in a neighbouring cabin while the matter was being arranged, was summoned, and came. He entered the cabin, and as he did so, I felt that the girl's start of astonishment communicated itself to me. Could this be the "boy" to whom they had sold pretty, petulant Norah Macdermot? A man of forty, hideous in face, deformed in figure, an evident bully and tyrant. As the girl was led up to him, she gave a scream, and burst into violent weeping, but the storm did not last. In five minutes she had choked down her sobs and was smiling upon the hideous monster.

and the smile did not die even when she was told that in the short space of two days she and Corney Beg would become one.

"And so, after all," I reflected, "Norah is disposed of in the usual way. Though she was sentimental enough to give away her heart, her hand has been easily disposed of by her parents; and although they have chosen so badly, she must abide by their will. Life is made up of customs. It would take a strong man's will to break through old-established rules, such as that by which the girl has been bought and sold."

It was late ere we rose to go. The kitchen, which had been gradually filling all the evening, was now crammed to suffocation. The whisky had taken good

effect. Some of the company were uproarious in their merriment, while others had completely collapsed. Close beside the fire, with his ugly head resting against a bedpost, his broad, flat nose emitting anything but musical sounds, sat the hero of the evening. But where was his bride elect? Although I could not help feeling some disgust that she should have yielded so smilingly to these well-laid plans, I should have liked, ere I departed, to have wished her the customary good luck. I glanced keenly at the oddly-mixed crowd, but I could find no trace of her, so I quietly made my way towards the door, and departed with Bridget unseen.

A keen wind blew from the north, the hills were white with sleet, and the blackened sky above portended an early fall

of snow. The wind was bitter, as we took a short cut across the fields, and walked swiftly homewards. Ere we had gone many yards, however, we paused suddenly, the soft grass had muffled our footsteps, and we had approached unheard to within a few feet of two figures, those of a man and a woman, who, standing on the other side of the grassy bank which surrounded the field, were talking earnestly in low, subdued tones. I usually despise an eavesdropper, yet I played the part of one. Bridget held me firmly, for we had both recognised the voice of one of the figures. It belonged to Norah Macdermot.

"Hush, now, Owen dear!" I heard her whisper, as, aided by the friendly turf, I approached a step or two nearer. "Sure,

ye don't think I'd be fool enough to marry the ugly omadhaun, when it's your own self that's wantin' me all the while?"

"What can ye do at all, now you've let them make the match and settle it all so nate?" returned Owen, sullenly.

"Well, this is what I'll do. When I go to bed to-night, I'll lave my dress on; the kitchen door shall be a bit open, and my windy unfastened. Now, ye'll just wait about the house till ye see me quench my light, then ye'll know that they're all safe asleep. So you'll jist get a couple o' strong boys to aid ye, and ye'll creep into the house and carry me off. Now, ye know well enough, Owen dear, that if ye can only get me a hundred yards from the house, ye are safe to keep me, because neither Corney Beg nor any dacent boy in

Storport would take me after that, if I'd double the fortune!"

"And don't ye call meself a dacent boy, Norah darlin'?"

"Sure enough, Owen dear; but then you know what the others don't know, that we planned the runaway atween us, just to get our own way afther all."

After listening to the foregoing conversation, I stood for a few moments in hesitation. The future of that girl was entirely in my hands. By stepping back to the hut which I had quitted, and whispering a word or two in the old people's ears, I could have frustrated all her well-laid plans, and condemned her to spend her days as the wife of Corney Beg. I now understood the reason of the sudden stifling of the sobs which had involuntarily burst

from the girl at the sight of her hideous lover. I now understood, too, the meaning of the strange smile which flitted over her face when she was told that ere forty-eight hours had passed she would become that monster's wife. The girl had been acting a part, throwing dust in the eyes of the company, in order to insure the success of her scheme. Should I retrace my steps? I did not feel at all inclined to do so; indeed, after another moment of hesitation, I took Bridget's hand upon my arm, walked swiftly towards the Lodge, and left the lovers to conclude their interview alone.

. . . . .

"Och, murther, if it's not a cryin' shame on the whole place!" were the first words which greeted my ears in the morning, as, languidly opening my eyes after a troubled

sleep, I saw the maid pulling back the curtains from my window, and admitting the dim light of day.

"Well, Mary, what's the matter?"

"I'm ashamed to say what's the matter, and that's the truth!" exclaimed Mary modestly, "'tis such a disgrace to Storport!"

Being quite aware that her feminine love of gossiping would not allow her to keep silent on the subject, I judiciously held my peace, and soon heard the whole story. It was merely this, that as soon as the Macdermots were comfortably asleep on the night before, "that thief o' the world, Owen O'Neil," as he was called, entered the house, and stole away the girl who had been refused to him, and promised to another; that, awakened by

the cries of the girl, the whole household had been aroused; and that the villain had been captured ere he got many hundred yards from the house, taken into custody, and handed over to the police.

"And there he'll stop, I hope," concluded the indignant Mary. "A nice beginning for Serapht, indeed. A fine thing if a boy can take away a dacent girl's character, and get nought done to him after all!"

The narrative excited me. I dressed hastily, and as hastily stepped down to Toney Macdermot's hut. Here all was confusion; and, ere I put my head in at the door, I perceived that Norah's prophecy of the previous night was surely coming true. The bashful swain had just been with his father to break off the match; the girl's

mother and father were in tears; her two brothers scowled at her like infuriated bears; but her face seemed to me to be brighter than I had seen it for many a day.

For some time the old people were inconsolable; at last their grief subsided. Being well aware that, after the escapade of the night before, no boy in the place would make a match with poor Norah, they were only too glad to hush the matter up, and hand over her and her fortune to Owen O'Neil. So Owen was released from the barrack, and, at Norah's request, invited to spend the evening at her father's house. Whether or not Norah's treachery was ever discovered, I never learned. I only know that, in two days after that memorable night,

she was married to Owen, and that during her married life she has never once missed giving "a dance" on the first night of Shrovetide.

CHAPTER III.

"MY day promises to be fine," said Nora, the next morning, as, flushed and panting from an early walk, she met me on the threshold of the Lodge. "I had my breakfast an hour ago, and went down to the ferry to see that everything was right. There's no wind for sailing — which is rather a pity, isn't it? for the *Ariel* goes like a bird; but I have made Shawn put in the sail, in case the breeze gets up later in the day."

"And what about the rowing, Nora?" asked my uncle; "have you sent for Conolly?"

"He isn't at home, papa," returned Nora; "so I've got Mickie and Patsey 'the ferry,' and I thought you would like to take Shawn."

"Yes, we'll take Shawn. Then is everything down, Nora?"

"Everything, I think, papa. There's your guns, your brown waterproof bag, full of cartridges, and the fishing-lines."

"And the dogs," I added.

"Oh, we mustn't take them!" said Nora. "You won't get any shooting till you get to Cruna, and then you can borrow Mr Dunroon's dogs. When he comes over here, he uses papa's dogs always, and he'd be dreadfully

offended if we wouldn't return the compliment."

As we had nothing to see to, we agreed to start at once, and in five minutes more we were on our way to the sea.

Only three of the girls, Kate, Nora, and Oona, were coming with us. Aileen and Biddy had generously volunteered to keep house in Kate's absence. Ever since that unfortunate overturning of the boat, Amy could never be persuaded to go on the water.

We found the boat waiting for us at the ferry, and though sorely pressed by the ferryman to enter the shebeen and have "just one glass," we resisted — embarked, pushed off, and rowed out to sea. Two of Shawn's big brothers and the old ferryman were on the shore, while in the fields

just above, quite a little crowd of boys and girls had collected to watch us row away.

The day was indeed gloriously fine. A shower of sunshine had come to melt away the early frost; but though the sky was blue and the sun-rays were warm, the air had in it a touch of winter chilliness still. We took a few strokes straight out to sea, then turned the boat's bow and continued our course, keeping within a couple of oar's-length from the sand. As we went, I looked back at the village, and saw it lying basking in a golden blaze of sunlight. Far away, the cliffs were wrapt in a hazy mist, the jagged crags and rounded summits clearly discernible against a bluish-grey sky. The wild waters of the Atlantic were hushed in oily calm,

and mirrored in the glassy surface were the surrounding hills. Not a ripple was on the bar as we glided gently over it, and not a sound was heard save the splash, splash of the oars, as we silently sat and enjoyed the beauty of the scene.

Once over the bar, the men rested on their oars, and looked to my uncle for instructions. He passed the look on to Nora, who was spokes-woman for the day.

"I think," said she, "we had better begin with a row round the cliffs; it's on our way. They are well worth seeing; and you might get a few pigeons. Afterwards we can strike out to sea and make straight for Cruna."

The proposition being agreed to, the boat's bow was turned towards the cliffs,

and sped on before the powerful strokes of our three sturdy boatmen. I had offered no opposition to the plan; indeed, at that moment I felt too lazily happy to oppose anything. I was stretched, half reclining, half sitting, among the rugs in the stern, close to Oona. When I was not looking at the scenery I was covertly watching her; and in my own mind I judged the latter prospect the fairer of the two.

She certainly looked very charming that day, clad in an elegantly-cut costume of serge, of the palest blue, with her golden hair half hidden beneath the soft brim of a blue hat. She had on her lap a volume of old legends which I had recommended her to read, and her gentle, dreamy eyes roamed hither and thither, as if in search

of materials for her stories which she worked at so persistently at home.

Suddenly the sound of my name aroused me from my reverie. I looked at Nora, who had addressed me, and, in obedience to her instructions, I put a couple of cartridges into my gun, passed the oarsmen, and placed myself in the boat's bow. I saw now that we were approaching the cliffs, a dark, grey mass, which rose above us to an enormous height, completely cutting off all the rays of the sun, and plunging us in cold shadow. It was like passing from summer to winter, from day to night.

For a time we paddled about at their base, entering narrows, black creeks and corners, and dark, secluded bays. Now and then the rowers rested upon their oars to give a splash and a shout. I

crouched in the bow, expectant, gun in hand, but beyond a few sand larks which had been wading in the shallows, and a frightened cormorant which flew out to sea, we could find nothing. The men phlegmatically returned to their work, and we again sped onwards.

Then we entered a narrow passage, cut between two enormous cliffs, one of which pointed needle-like to the sky. The water below appeared to be as black as ebony; the cliffs almost black, and perfectly barren.

The boat paused.

"Look out, yer honor," cried Shawn; and he placed his hands over his mouth, and whistled shrilly and loud.

"Look out, Jack, there they are; blaze away, my boy," cried my uncle; and I did blaze away with both my barrels, and

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looked about for the result. Alas! there was none. Half-a-dozen rock-pigeons, looking small as starlings, high in the air passed swiftly over the top of the cliff and disappeared. I was so chagrined by my ill-luck that I forgot to reload; luckily my uncle was on the *qui vive*, so the next brace that came out, fell like stones to his two barrels.

"Are ye ready, yer honor?" said Shawn, looking at me rather gloomily; and upon my answering in the affirmative, he put his hands over his mouth, and whistled again, while his brothers rattled and splashed with the oars. Three more birds flew swiftly out, and again my barrels were discharged, but nothing fell; then a straggler whizzed like a bullet over our heads, and fell to my uncle's gun.

I looked round, and asked him how he managed it.

"'Tis because I'm accustomed to the motion of the boat, and you're not," he returned quietly. "Shawn, are they all out, do you think?—if so, we'll go on to the next cave, and give Mr Stedman another chance."

They evidently were all gone, for, though Shawn whistled and his brothers shouted and splashed, no more birds appeared. We picked up those already dead, and went on. Soon we came to another cavern, even larger than the last.

"Jack," cried my uncle, "put some cartridges in your pocket, for we're going to land you, you'll shoot steadier from the rock."

He spoke rapidly to the men in Irish,

and the boat was rowed up to a huge mass of rock, which, it being low tide, was uncovered, and which lay just outside the mouth of the cave. The water was turbulent here, and the boat rose and fell tumultuously; but I watched my chance, and succeeded in leaping safely out. Once I was landed, the boat pushed rapidly off, and disappeared into the cavern.

I set my teeth in grim determination, my late ignominious failures having made me doggedly determined to succeed, and I soon proved that my uncle was right; with the steady rock beneath my feet, I shot well; three pigeons fell to my gun, and when the boat returned to take me on board, after having picked up my spoil, Shawn's face was transformed.

"After all, a bad beginning is better

than a bad ending," said Oona. "Look, Nora, when we get out a bit, we shall find breeze enough to sail to Cruna."

And she was right; as soon as we were well away from the shelter of the cliffs, we hoisted the sail, and the *Ariel*, guided by my uncle's steady hand, breasted the waves like a bird.

Three hours' sailing brought us well within shelter of Cruna.

It was a solitary island, rising up to an enormous height above the level of the sea. As we approached, a sharp, jagged crag bent above us, but detecting malice in the attitude, we hurried on, and fortunately escaped an enormous boulder, which was suddenly detached, and rolled with a tremendous crash into the sea.

Next we entered a passage which, as we

proceeded, broadened out into a good-sized channel, and we found ourselves in what would have been an enormous cavern, if it had had another roof than the clear blue sky. Here the surge was so great that our boat was in a fair way of being upset, when one of the men, intending to make her secure, jumped airily out on to the rocks, missed his footing, and gently disappeared beneath the surface of the water! I began seriously to think that our expedition would have a tragic ending, for the surge was so great, the passage so narrow, that our means of assisting him seemed small indeed, but the men, more accustomed to such mishaps, were of a different opinion. Two of them coolly secured the end of a rope, and lightly leapt out on to the rocks, leaving the third in the boat, who, when the unfortunate

victim appeared on the surface, slipped a noose under his arm-pits. He was gently hauled out on the rocks, very little the worse for his bath.

After this exciting little incident, we landed and examined the rocks. They rose up to such a height that the brain turned dizzy when we tried to decipher the tiny specks of birds which were floating above like gnats in the sun-ray. As they descended, the shrill whistle of the curlew reached our ears; we crouched in a corner, but the wary birds were not to be deceived, their quick eyes soon saw the danger, and with a taunting cry of "curlew," they disappeared round a corner of the crag.

Slowly, very slowly, we made our way along the slippery rocks—now going down on our knees, and passing some dangerous

bit on all-fours; now seizing a small projecting piece of stone, and holding on for very life, while our feet searched for a cranny among the slippery seaweed below. Thus we passed along, avoiding any mishap. until we came to an opening in the rock, and entered a low narrow passage, apparently leading into the interior of the island. Here the air was damp and chilly, our voices had a hollow, unearthly sound, and it was so dark that we had to grope our way. As we proceeded, the passage broadened, and faint streaks of light appeared; next we heard the deep-drawn breathing of the waters, then we were gladdened with a burst of broad sunlight, and we found ourselves approaching an enormous cavern.

The channel here was considerably broader

than the last, and the cave was open at either end. About midway in the channel was a good-sized weedy reef, which was covered with great black seals. Our approach caused a general panic; they all rushed down to the water, and swam about like dogs. We gazed around, and examined every creek and corner within our reach, but we could discover nothing,—all was quiet and peaceful as a tomb; our voices echoed through the vault, and our footsteps gave forth a hollow, unearthly sound. Not a living thing was visible until we fired a shot, and then, as if by magic, the whole air was filled with birds; suddenly they all disappeared, leaving the place as quiet and peaceful as before.

Having seen all there was to be seen, we retraced our steps through the dark

passage, mounted a flight of stairs which had been roughly hewn out of the solid rock; and, after half-an-hour, which seemed an eternity, re-emerged into the sunlight, and found ourselves standing upon the fruitful fields of Cruna. It was a good-sized island, about ten miles across, inhabited by several hundred people, and governed completely by the master. Some of the peasants who dwelt thereon had never even seen the mainland, but were content to toil all day on the land, to dwell in the cabins which were dotted like beaver-huts about the hills, and to rest at last in the graveyard by the sea. There was no resident priest, but Father John occasionally sent over his curate to preach the Word and administer consolation to the sick. There was no resident doctor, but occa-

sionally a travelling medicine-man came, *en passant*, to the island, and rested for a month or so among the sick. All this information I got from Nora, who proceeded to inform me that, during the time of old Mr Dunroon, things upon Cruna Island had been in a very bad way indeed; that Mr Dunroon himself—an ignorant, superstitious man—had encouraged belief in witchcraft, the evil eye, etc., until the people had actually burnt down the house of an old woman, whom they believed to be a witch, and had finally driven her forth to perish in the sea.

"But things are much better under the new master," added Nora. "He is stern in his endeavour to put down superstition of any kind; he has built a capital school, and I believe he will soon have a resident priest. Look, there is the master's house;

I think we had better go straight there, hadn't we, Kate?"

Kate assented, so we set off—I carrying Oona's cloak and book, and keeping as close as possible to Oona's side.

The building which we approached was a plain-looking structure, built of stone, and whitewashed. It was surrounded by a fine garden, however, and backed by capacious stables, dog-kennels, etc.

From any sign of life there was about, the house might have been deserted; but Kathleen's knock brought to the door a very neat little maid, who showed us at once into the drawing-room. The little maid was evidently no stranger to the girls, for they all said something to her in Irish, which made her blush and smile; and then my uncle added those kind words of his, which

were always ready, and which made him so popular in Connaught.

We entered the drawing-room, and were all looking about for comfortable seats, when the door opened, and the mistress of the house appeared. She was a tall, graceful woman, with a face which, in its youth, could not have been unlike Oona's. Though she had passed her fortieth year, she still retained a good deal of her youthful beauty. Her hair was golden, her eyes were blue—like, yet unlike, Oona's; for at times there came into them a look which seemed to transform them, and which I could not understand. I glanced from her to Oona —from Oona back again to her; the two faces were similar, but at last I understood the difference,—the one had faced pleasure, the other only pain. Yes, I had before me

just such a picture as my darling little Oona would present after the experience of heart-rending sorrow.

Mrs Dunroon was delighted to see us, and she said so in the most winning voice that had ever fallen upon my ear,—"Though she feared," she said, "it was but a dull house for the girls to come to. All her children had returned to their schools in Dublin only a fortnight before; they had made the house lively while they were at home, but since their departure, she and George had fallen into their old routine."

Then she was introduced to me, and I began to make some apology for intruding uninvited; but she silenced me at once.

"It is you who confer the favour," she said, smiling, and letting her fine eyes rest for a moment upon my face. "If you will

only shoot over the land and fish the rivers, we shall be delighted, for my husband's guns are growing rusty for want of use, and the dogs are getting so fat they soon won't be able to walk."

Then she asked us to excuse her; she was certain we must be famishing; the moment she heard of our arrival she had ordered lunch to be served, but she thought our chance of getting it quickly would be doubled if she went to the kitchen and helped the maids.

The moment she was gone, Nora asked me what I thought of her?

"She is about the most charming woman I ever met. In her youth she must have been the image of Oona."

To my amazement my uncle went over to Oona, who was sitting on the music

stool, put his arms round her, and lifted her sweet face to his.

"Like my Oona?" he said, and his voice actually trembled. "Ah! the good God forbid that my little girl should ever have to face such scenes."

I suspected before that there must have been some strange episode in our hostess's past; now I was sure of it. I was about to ask some questions about it, when Nora addressed me again.

"I am glad you like her," she said, "for we all adore her; and as for papa, he thinks there is no such woman in the world. She is very beautiful, is she not? and she is as good as she is beautiful."

"Does she live here all the year round?"

"Almost. She and her husband come occasionally to Ballyshanrany, and every winter, I believe, they go to Dublin for a while, but that is all. You see Mrs Dunroon loves Cruna, though indeed she has little cause; and most of her time is spent in trying to stamp out superstition, and improve the people."

Here our conversation was interrupted by the re-appearance of our hostess. "Luncheon will be ready in five minutes," she said, and she had us all shown to our rooms.

It was a capital lunch, capitally served, and we did full justice to it. After it was over, we began to discuss our arrangements. "It was growing late," my uncle said, and if we wanted to reach Storport at a decent hour, we must

soon think of returning. But Mrs Dunroon was horrified. Return to Storport that night, she said, it was not to be thought of. We must stay a few days, and have some sport; besides, we couldn't think of leaving without having seen her husband, who had ridden over to a distant part of the island to transact some important business, and would not return till six. After a very feeble resistance, we yielded, in reality by no means displeased. I, in truth, was very glad to remain, for I was already very much interested in Cruna Island. I felt I should like to see more of it, and to know more of its people.

Lunch fairly over, our hostess set herself the task of providing us all with amusement for the afternoon. Kathleen

preferred to remain in the house, my uncle and Nora were provided with a couple of fishing rods, while I accepted my hostess's invitation to mount one of her husband's horses, and take a ride round the island. Then Mrs Dunroon turned to Oona,—

"Would you like a ride, too, dear?" she said; "if so, I think I can make my habit fit you." And Oona assented.

We set off together, and had a long ride, but I am afraid I saw very little of the island. The ride, however, seemed to have done us good, for we were both in excellent spirits when we got back again. During dinner we were beset with questions about what we had seen. My uncle had been trying some of Aileen's flies, and was in great spirits at having killed

a couple of salmon. Both Oona and I had to confess, rather shamefacedly, that we had neither been far, nor seen much.

"I am afraid," I said, speaking to my hostess, but glancing occasionally at the radiant face of my cousin, "that Oona would never make her living as a guide. Now, on a place like Cruna Island, there must be oceans of spots where the fairies dance and the witches hide. Oona has positively not pointed out one."

I glanced at my hostess, and stared in wonder at the look of mingled pain and terror which crossed her face. She tried to conquer it. I saw she fought bravely, but I saw she could not answer, and her eyes filled with tears. Then, suddenly, I remembered the allusions which had been

made to some great sorrow in the lady's past life, and I felt that my few light words had touched the chord.

There was a moment of intense silence, till Kathleen, always ready in time of need, began to tell about Shawn's doings that day, and the conversation soon became general. But I could not forget the incident, it haunted me all the evening, and was still unpleasantly vivid in my mind when I rose to go to bed. Having reached my room, I found Nora seated in an easy-chair, looking very important, and very mysterious indeed.

CHAPTER IV.

"COUSIN JACK," she said, when in obedience to her command I had carefully closed the door, "you are fond of reading in bed, aren't you?"

"Very."

"I've got a story for you to-night, which I want you to read—will you?"

"Of course I will."

"Read it all to-night—every word of it—for to-morrow I mean to show you

where the scene of the story is laid, and introduce you to two of the characters. You would like that?"

I replied in the affirmative; at the same time I expressed my amazement that the story, if a true one, should have found its way into print, for by this time Nora had produced a modest-looking volume, which I perceived at once to be a collection of tales, had opened it, and pointed out the first as the one which she recommended to my special care. Thereupon Nora proceeded to explain.

"It is about two years ago this autumn," she said, "since a very benevolent-looking old gentleman, with a long white beard, grey hair, and spectacles, came down to look at Mr O'Neil's

shooting-lodge, that white tumble-down looking house on the face of the hill, you know, which he lets whenever he can, with some of the land thereabouts. He wasn't much taken with the house, but he called at the Lodge to ask papa about the shooting, and we invited him to stay to lunch. Well, it turned out a very wet afternoon, so, as he seemed in no great hurry to go, Kate offered him a bed, and said he had better dismiss the car which had brought him, and take ours as far as Glenderig, on the following day. Well, it ended in his staying with us for a fortnight. While he was there, I told him this story. About six months after he was gone I received one morning this little volume, and on opening it was amazed to find

my name on the fly-leaf. Look, here it is."

She turned to the fly-leaf of the book, and I beheld, written in a neat little hand,—

"To Miss Nora Kenmare—part author of story number one—in memory of my first visit to Connaught."

Nora had certainly succeeded in interesting me. When I found myself alone, I did not attempt to go to bed, but having settled myself, I opened the volume and began to read

"The Maid of Cruna Island."

The very title caught me. I turned up my lamp, and settled myself down comfortably to read the tale.

"Deep darkness hung like a cloud above Cruna Island; the sky was dark, unrelieved by star or moon; and on every hand stretched the sea — jet black and glassily calm — but on the shingly beach of the island the waves broke into snow-white surf, on which a ray of light played faintly, now gleaming in sparkles upon the thin line of foam, now shining like a steady star on the jet-black waters beyond.

The light issued from the window of a hut which stood upon the beach, in the shadow of an overhanging crag; the oval roof of this strangely-situated dwelling was formed of the upturned hull of an old fishing-smack, while the walls were built of loose pieces of rock, and stones which had evidently been collected from

the shore. Altogether the place was one in which some worn-out old sea-rover might have wished to spend his declining years. About it, in time of storm, the salt sea spray was wafted; around it the sea-weed clung; on the rocks beside it the cormorants swarmed, and the sea-gulls screamed; everywhere about the weed-covered crags, the sea-piets flew; while far away to sea the gannet shot like a stone upon his prey. The light issuing from the hut, and flashed upon the edge of the sea, revealed also to the eye a small rudely-built coble, which was drawn up the beach, and securely fastened to a huge boulder lying beside the hut; close to this a thick rope was coiled upon the ground. The room, which the half-

open door revealed, was of moderate dimensions, and in every way harmonised with the external appearance of the hut. The floor was paved with small round stones, which were carefully placed and brightly polished; dried fish, coils of rope, and fishing-lines hung from rafters which were black as ebony. In one corner stood a pair of rudely-made oars, and in another, neatly folded, was a red canvas lug-sail. At the upper end of the floor a small square space was left unpaved, and on this slowly smouldered away two or three clods of peat. The occupants of the room were an old woman and a young girl. The girl sat in the window recess, with her head bent down over an old, stained Irish Bible, which lay open on her knees, and from which she was reading.

The old woman had placed herself on a small stool, close beside the smouldering fire. Her face was of that ashen-grey hue which is generally found only on the faces of the dead. Her hair, which was white as snow, was carefully smoothed over her forehead. Her eyes were sunken and around them was a jet-black ring, which gave to her face a sinister look. Her brows were contracted into a habitual frown; nose long and pinched; lips thin and slightly compressed. Her figure was angular and bony. She wore a plain black cap, carefully tied beneath her chin, and a black gown, which was raised up in the front, and pinned around her waist, falling at the back like a long peaky tail. Although she was seventy years of age, her back was straight as an arrow, as

she sat upon her stool, with her bony hands crossed upon her knee, and her pale lack-lustre eyes gazing sternly upon a tombstone which rested against the opposite wall, and on which was marked two words—her own name—

AILEEN O'CONNOR.

The expression of the face was one of terrible resolve and quiet determination. The thin compressed lips, long hooked nose, and knitted brow, were formidable characteristics, especially when coupled, as in this case, with a most repelling and disdainful manner.

Small blame, therefore, could be attached to the inhabitants of Cruna Island, when they attributed to Aileen O'Connor all the power and subtleties of witchcraft;

when they believed that her very glance could deal death, or worse, to man or beast; and that she was in the possession of numerous diabolic arts, by which she had the power of dealing misfortune or prosperity to any of her numerous neighbours.

Scarce a person on the island would have dared gainsay her in word or deed, and it was averred by the peasantry that the master himself would as soon have ordered his coffin as have issued the command that Aileen O'Connor was forthwith to quit his territory.

Fourteen years before, when the inhabitants of Cruna Island had one morning found her, with a little child, inhabiting the deserted, half-ruined cabin on the beach, they had looked at each other in some

suspicion and intense surprise. Where had the strangers come from, and by what means had they contrived to reach the shore?

Cruna Island was by no means accessible, and on the morning of the strangers' arrival there were no strange smacks to be seen in the bay. The whole proceeding savoured so strongly of magic that the cloudy brains of the islanders were fairly puzzled. Quickly they pressed around the extraordinary apparitions, and as quickly were they repelled, for Aileen O'Connor met their advances with a cold and haughty repulse. She answered no questions, volunteered no explanations, and finally the baffled inquisitors perforce retired from the contest, as much enlightened on the subject as they had been

on the first day of the strangers' arrival.

Such proceedings as these were not suffered to pass unnoted even on the lonely shores of Cruna Island. No sooner did the master become acquainted with the facts of the case than he hurried to the scene of action, fully prepared to excommunicate the pair who had dared to settle thus unceremoniously upon his dominions. On reaching the beach he had found his people congregated together about the hut. Quickly passing through their midst, he had entered the cabin, closing the door behind him. There he had remained for a time, while without gathered a little crowd, who fully expected that before half-an-hour had elapsed the strangers would be sailing away for other shores. Great was their amazement, how-

ever, when at length the master issued from the cabin, and informed them, in a trembling voice, that the strangers were Crunans.

None knew what had wrought this change in the mind of the man, none thought of connecting him in the remotest way with the ghastly-looking woman ; still less could they have conceived the whole facts of the case.

On entering the cabin, the master of Cruna stood face to face with Aileen O'Connor, a girl whom, in his youth, he had wronged and deceived, and who, smarting under the sting of neglect, and after heartbroken appeals to the man whom she had loved, had emigrated from her home, vowing upon him some terrible revenge. Never since then had her lover

beheld her, scarcely had the thought of her crossed his mind; but when the girl, transformed into an elderly woman, had so suddenly and unexpectedly appeared before him, his soul was shaken, and he lacked the heart to drive her forth again.

The mystery surrounding the phantom woman deepened year by year; her retired mode of living giving rise to numerous conjectures, which in time ripened into certainties. Scarcely a soul had ever been known to cross her threshold, yet her manner of living soon became known, and when the islanders were assured of the fact that she spent her time sitting beside the fire, calmly gazing upon the stone which was to mark her own last resting-place, they cast upon each other most gloomy, significant looks. In their per-

plexity they turned to the child for information, yet here their curiosity met with small gratification.

On her arrival at the island, Nina O'Connor had scarcely attained her sixth year, and the fund of information with which she attempted to gratify the eager inquiries of the islanders was of the most unsatisfactory kind.

She only knew that she had no friends but her Aunt Aileen, as she called her, who for some mystic reason had migrated from the south to end her days on the lonely Irish coast. Nina was a pretty child, with soft brown eyes and hair. About her there was some charm, some invisible attraction, which would have gone far to soften the natures of much more obdurate-hearted people than those at Cruna Island. About

these she cast a glamour which quickly secured for her the good graces of the whole community, and, in a measure, those of the master himself.

This latter phenomenon might be easily accounted for; the landlord, although hard and pitiless, had been somewhat softened since the death of his wife and only child, who were lost at sea some six years before the arrival of the strangers on the island. The catastrophe had wrought in him a wondrous change, since, in a measure, he blamed himself as the main cause of the calamity. In point of fact, the blame, if blame there was, could be attached to no one in particular, unless, indeed, to the victim herself, who had sacrificed her own life, as well as that of their child, mainly through allegiance to her husband.

Ever careful over his wife's safety, he had sent her to Dublin to pass over an event which might, he feared, have serious results if it happened in the lonely wilds of Cruna. In Dublin his first child had been born to him, but scarcely had his wife recovered her strength when she got news that her husband was seriously ill. Struggling thus between wifely and maternal love, she had ultimately sailed from the city in mid-winter to attend the sick-bed of her husband. That husband she had never again beheld. The vessel which was bringing her home, being overtaken by a terrible storm, had foundered within sight of the island, and every soul on board had perished. From this blow the man had never thoroughly recovered, and the loss of his child especially had gone far

towards softening his heart to children generally.

When little Nina O'Connor first began to run about the island, it happened, in the natural course of things, that the master was constantly encountering her. At first his manner towards her was the same as that towards any other children of the village; but gradually her pretty face and winsome ways drew his attention towards her, and on observing her more closely he began to notice that she was just the age that his own child would have been, had she been spared him. Henceforth his interest in her increased. Whenever he met her he invariably paused to speak to her, or pat her soft cheek; occasionally he presented to her some pence or rude toy; and once, when he saw her near his house, he actually

took her in, and allowed her to pass an hour or so in the gloomy dwelling, entertained by his little nephew and heir-apparent, George Dunroon, while he himself watched the two in grim pleasure.

The young master, who was some years older than Nina, was a kindly lad, though rather wild and irreclaimable in his conduct. He had spent some years of his life on Cruna Island; for, on the death of his aunt, he had at once been sent by his mother, doubtless with a sly eye to the future, to afford consolation to the old man. In truth, the free, unrestrained atmosphere of Cruna suited the lad far better than the murky air of the southern city where he had been born. Having a fancy for daring adventure, he was constantly out exploring the island, or scour-

ing the crags, over which he hung at times suspended, eagerly searching for the nests of the eagle or rock-raven. Nina soon became a partner in his wanderings, under his auspices becoming acquainted with every corner of the island, or at times accompanying him to his uncle's house, where the children were like gleams of sunshine brightening up the gloomy place. No sooner did the state of affairs reach the ears of Aileen O'Connor than she sternly forbade the child ever again to approach the master's house or to seek the company of his nephew; and more than once, when George came to the hut to seek for Nina, the old woman harshly drove him from the door. After this the children had never again met openly; but, unable to perceive the justice

of such unwonted tyranny, they continued to meet in secret, until the boy was sent back to his friends in the south, and Nina was left alone.

As years passed on, and Nina grew to womanhood, she saw that a cloud was gradually darkening her horizon. The islanders grew less kindly in their manner towards her; soon they began to shun her altogether; and once or twice she even noticed the master shrink from her very glance. These signs of hostility were only preparatory to the assertion, which gradually became whispered about, that the girl was affected with the "evil eye," a curse which she had doubtless inherited from her diabolic relative. Soon, indeed, it was most emphatically averred that one glance from her eye had actually struck the widow

Monnaghan's black cow as dead as a stone, and that little Shamus Beg, the fiddler's son, had never been able to leave his chair since Nina's looks had last rested upon his face. Finding it utterly hopeless to correct the reports which were thus circulated concerning her, Nina was fain at length to shrug her shoulders and bow her head, in silent concession. Being thus debarred from all social intercourse with her neighbours, utterly companionless, save for the gloomy society of her aunt, the girl thenceforth led the life of a recluse. She felt that her presence created disgust, malignant suspicion, and sometimes hatred; and she knew that, were it not for the evil attributes with which she and her aunt were supposed to be endowed, some consummate evil would surely be meditated against them.

In this moral atmosphere she dwelt. Her days were spent in lonely wanderings on the island; her evenings in reading aloud to her aunt from the old, stained Irish Bible, or sitting beside the cabin door listening to the surging sea. At the opening of our story Nina had scarcely attained her twentieth year. Rather small of stature, possessed of a lithe, graceful figure, soft round cheeks, brown eyes, and a mass of long, nut-brown hair, she was a strong contrast to her gaunt, ghastly-looking relative.

The light of a lamp flashed down upon her, brilliantly illuminating her face and figure. She wore an ordinary peasant's dress; her hair was twisted and neatly coiled round her head; the light in her eyes was keen and penetrating, and a thoughtful, preoccupied expression was on her face.

As she read, her voice rang through the room, not in its usual quiet measured cadencies, but in fluctuating uncertainty; and now and again an access of tremor was perceptible. She seemed restless and uneasy. Her foot was tapping on the floor, her fingers pulling at the edges of her book; and at times peeping cautiously through the window, she vainly endeavoured to penetrate into the gloom.

The old woman sat motionless as a statue, listening in grim satisfaction to the words which fell upon her ear, while her eyes still rested upon the tombstone. The air was oppressively still, not a sound was to be heard but the weary washing of the sea. A loud and prolonged shout of many voices from a distance soon caused Nina to start

violently and leap to her feet, casting the book roughly upon the floor.

"What is the matter, Nina?" asked Aileen O'Connor, half-turning towards the girl.

"Sure, 'tis the young master, I think, Aunt Aileen, that has just arrived."

Running to the door, Nina gazed anxiously forth. On the cliffs, some distance from the cabin, a crowd of people was dimly perceptible, and lights moved, while from the sea a ray of light, evidently proceeding from the mast of a ship, shone brightly as a star. At sight of this, Nina's heart gave a great leap, and her lip quivered. Leaning against the door-post, she gazed on. Beside the fire the old woman sat, gaunt as a shadow. As the shout struck upon *her* ear, the expression of her

face grew sterner and more determined still, while her bloodless lips muttered slowly,—

"The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation. With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

CHAPTER V.

"THE master of Cruna Island was a prosperous man in the true sense of the word. The house which he occupied—a small edifice of stone, far superior in appearance to any of those surrounding it—was placed on a height in the middle of the island, and while standing at the windows of any one of the rooms, he could gaze upon well-fed flocks and herds, and several miles of well-tilled land, and truthfully repeat the rhyme,—

"I am monarch of all I survey,
My right there is none to dispute;
From the centre all round to the sea,
I am lord of the fowl and the brute."

Unlike the barren bogs and mountains which characterise the scenery of Connemara, the land of Cruna Island was tolerably fruitful, it having been carefully cultivated by its successive proprietors. Each year its nominal value had increased, and when it became the property of the present owner, it might be said to represent a very tolerable income. Every available acre of land had been manipulated for cultivation. Stretches of bright, green pasture and fields of yellow corn were everywhere revealed to the eye, and above, far up, near the clouds, where the furrows of the ploughshare had not penetrated, were barren heights

and craggy mountain-peaks, where the fox and the mountain goat dwelt unmolested, where the grouse bred, and the blue hares abounded. Here and there on the hillsides, or lying half-hidden in a waving sea of ripe corn, were little fishing-hamlets, the picturesque dwellings of the population, a quaint people, in whose minds still reigned paramount many of those wild legendary superstitions which had been believed in by their ancestors. No breeze from the south ever penetrated to those hills; seldom was a stranger known to tread those lonely shores. Century after century had passed away, races of men sprung up and died, the outer world progressed and changed, but still the inhabitants of Cruna Island remained as little enlightened in their ideas as had been

their progenitors before them. In this respect, it must be avowed, the master himself seemed little in advance of his people. He was a man who possessed little more education than his tenants, who was, to some extent, guided by their feeble lights, and whose head was equally as full of invincible superstitions.

One morning, some two days after the young master's arrival at Cruna, the lad lay full length on a plot of grass before his uncle's door, his head resting upon his crossed hands as he gazed silently up at the cloudless sky. Beside him, a greyhound was stretched basking in the sunshine as lazily as his master, while a few paces off sat the old man himself on a rude wooden bench which was erected beside his door. He sat silent; his broad, brown hands rest-

ing on the top of a stick which stood between his knees, and his dull eyes fixed upon his nephew's indolent face. At length he spoke.

"How long do you intend to stay, George?" he asked, and without raising his head or changing his position the young man replied,—

"Till autumn only, then I must go to Dublin for a month."

"And will you not grow tired before then?"

"Tired? not I. Cruna gives one a foretaste of Paradise in weather like this." Then rising to his feet he asked suddenly,—

"By the way, uncle, what has become of Nina O'Connor, my little playmate; is she still here?"

Immediately the old man's manner

changed. Glancing keenly into his nephew's face, he replied,—

"The girl is here; more sorrow to me, and to you too, George, if you seek her out. Accursed was that day when those two women first came to Cruna!"

George stared in amazement as he asked,—

"Why, what has she done?"

"Ask rather what has she not done?" exclaimed Mr Dunroon. "The girl has the 'evil eye,' and 'tis only by carefully pleasing her and her accursed relative that the land is fruitful."

"Nina O'Connor a witch! ridiculous!" ejaculated George. A residence in the south had effectually erased from his mind all the innocent conceptions which he had imbibed in Cruna, and rendered him scep-

tical in more matters than that of witchcraft.

"I tell you it is *true*, George!" doggedly asserted his uncle. "'Twas only with one glance of her eye that she withered up the corn in that field. The girl is accursed in the sight of heaven; never come near her while you are in Cruna, and never again mention her name to me!"

The latter part of the behest was obeyed to the letter. Being perfectly acquainted with his uncle's obdurate, narrow-minded, superstitious nature, the lad knew full well that any attempt on his part to shake the ideas which he had conceived about Nina would be utterly futile, and perhaps would only serve to make his uncle's conviction more bitter.

Accordingly, he held his peace. His

mind, however, unlike his lips, was bound by no restrictions. During that day, his thoughts constantly turned to Nina, and, contrary to the sage advice of his relative, he determined to seek her out on the first opportunity. Far from shaking his determination, Nina's reputed skill in the "black arts" only served to make it more sure, and inspire in him a livelier interest in the girl.

While he had been absent from the island, Nina had been little in his mind; other impressions had crowded upon him, entirely sweeping her from his thoughts; now that he was back again, the remembrance of his childhood's days was recalled to him, and the picture of Nina O'Connor was inseparably mixed up in all his reflections. Eight years had passed since he

had seen her, and George fell to picturing the changes which those eight years might have wrought in her, and he wondered if he would find in the woman the same affectionate heart and gentle nature he had known and loved in the child. In such reflections George was not alone. Ever since Nina had heard of his projected return to the island, she on her part had been conjuring up pictures of her boyish playmate, and wondering what he would think when he found her thus friendless, shunned and despised as it were by every human soul.

Despite the gentleness with which the girl had submitted to the tyranny which had been exercised over her, there was in her nature a portion of that quiet resolve which was so marked a characteristic of her

aunt. The assertions concerning her, she had treated with the utmost scorn, coming as they did from people whom she had learned to despise; but now, she thought, the case would be different; and, on that night when she had stood against the door-post, watching the flickering light in the bay, she had involuntarily asked herself the question,—

"Will George treat me as these people do?"

Her thoughts of him were filled with pleasant associations. She knew that in his youth he had possessed a kindly disposition, and she thought that, after eight years residence in the south, he must return a gentleman, with expanded mind and enlightened ideas, a being in every way fit to rule in Cruna. Although she herself

had been brought up within the lonely limits of the island, with no wider experience of humanity than the superstitious islanders, Nina's mind was of a different mould. Had she been reared solely under their auspices, the girl might necessarily have inherited much of their legendary lore, but Aileen O'Connor, who had dwelt in more enlightened climes, regarded the islanders, including the master himself, as a set of creatures whose only possible claim to humanity was that of form, certainly not of intellect. Secretly hating and despising every one, and more especially the master himself, she had endeavoured to bring Nina round to her own lights. She had succeeded so far as to brighten up the girl's intelligence, and give her more enlightened ideas of human nature, and the world in

general, than she could possibly have obtained had she been cast solely upon her own resources.

For George's return Nina had looked as for that of an old friend. During the eight years of their separation, she, having no other excitement in her mind, had been constantly thinking of, nay, almost looking forward to the time when the boy should come back and brighten up her dreary existence.

No sooner, therefore, did he return to the island, than she lengthened her daily walks in the hope of meeting him. She knew that, even were he so inclined, he would not dare to seek her at her home, for, ever since that day, now so many years ago, when, with wild imprecations, the old woman had driven him from her door,

he had never once attempted to cross the threshold. So Nina looked for him abroad, but for many days her search was vain.

One evening, however, after a long stroll, she sat down to rest upon the grass-covered crags, when she was suddenly startled by the report of a gun. She rose and looked around her, but she could see no one. Presently, however, a hare came bounding along, and, when a few yards from her feet, fell dead. Trembling, she glanced around again. Almost immediately the sportsman became visible. First came a dog, a black retriever, which, with nose to the ground, was closely following the track of the hare; at no very great distance behind the dog hurried the slight figure of a young man, clad in a grey shooting-suit, carrying a gun

on his shoulder, and closely followed by a coarse-looking fisher-boy.

One by one the party appeared on the top of a hill which rose a distance from the crags, cutting off the flat sweep of land. Nina looked intently at the sportsman, while he, with his eyes fixed on the dog, came walking direct towards her.

At first the face seemed perfectly unknown to her, but, as the man drew nearer, and she got a better view of the features, she gradually seemed to recognise in him her old friend, George Dunroon. The recognition became complete when at length the young man called to his dog in a voice that, despite the changes of years, she knew well.

Breathless with his run, George paused within a few yards of where the girl stood,

and stooped to lift the hare which the dog had deposited at his feet. On turning to cast it to the boy, his eyes suddenly fell upon Nina, who stood quietly watching his movements.

He started, paused, the next moment he strode forward, holding forth his hand.

"Nina!" he exclaimed, as he clasped her fingers in his hand, and looked admiringly into her face. "I declare I hardly knew you; what a pretty girl you have grown!"

Nina opened her lips to speak, but, in glancing over George's shoulder, her eyes rested upon a sight which made her burst into a fit of somewhat petulant laughter.

The boy, who had followed the young master, horrified at the sudden encounter with Nina, had hurriedly seized the hare,

and anxious, no doubt, to put a safe distance between himself and the girl, was engaged in making a most ignominious retreat.

George was about to call him, when Nina put her hand on his arm,—

"You need not do that," she said, "he'll never turn."

"Why not?" asked George.

Nina looked full into his face as she said, in a half-sarcastic, half-bitter tone,—

"Because, sir, he wouldn't like to be bewitched."

In a moment George remembered his uncle's accusation, which, till then, he had almost forgotten.

"The little imp," he muttered, half-angrily; then turning towards the girl, he said, "perhaps we are as well without him,

for, now we have met, I don't mean to let you escape so easily, Nina. Where are you going?"

"Just along the shore to my home."

"Then I will walk with you," answered George, instinctively assuming towards the girl all his old protecting manner; "'tis a long time since we had a ramble together, isn't it, Nina?"

"Indeed it is, sir," replied Nina softly, as with eyes fixed on the ground she seemed to travel back over the vista of those past years.

"Have you missed me much?" asked George.

"Yes," answered Nina, in the same soft tone. "It has felt lonely."

"And you are glad to see me back?"

"I am, sir," was the simple reply.

Silence followed. Both now seemed in a waking dream, occupied with a pleasant retrospect,—their eyes on the quiet sea.

"Come, Nina," George said quietly, as he approached her side, "as we go along you must tell me all that has happened to you since we parted."

Side by side the two walked along in the fading light, and ere long Nina was talking to George in as free and unrestrained a manner as she had been wont to talk in years gone by. Although changed so much outwardly, George possessed the same frank, kindly nature that had been noteworthy in the boy, and ere she had been half-an-hour in his company, Nina felt no longer abashed and reserved, but rather as if she were in the presence of an intimate friend. When they parted, she

gave him her hand as frankly as she had been wont to give her lips in the old times.

The intimacy recommenced under such favourable auspices, soon ripened into strong friendship. Ere long, Mr Dunroon observed that George, studiously bent upon visiting all his old haunts, seemed to have a particular fancy for visiting those haunts alone. Whenever his uncle proposed to accompany him, the prepared expedition was always either abandoned altogether, or the master's society shufflingly dispensed with. Altogether, George's conduct was inexplicable. Day after day his hound lay lazily in the sunshine, and his guns grew rusted from long disuse. The master, who himself had been little of a saint, was by no means inclined to attribute saintship to others.

He knew there must be some great cause for his nephew's conduct, and he soon discovered what he had all along suspected,—that, despite his sage advice, the boy had been "bewitched," and that his pretended expeditions over the island resolved themselves into nothing more or less than clandestine meetings with Nina.

Indeed, either for good or ill, Nina quickly exerted a great influence over the young master,—which influence his uncle naturally attributed to the "evil eye," or some other of her aunt's diabolic arts. Certain it was, that the friendship between the two strengthened each day, and that George soon discovered he was never so happy as when lounging by Nina's side, and looking into her face.

. . . . . .

"You have been here two months to-day, and, do you remember, this is the place where we met?'

Nina sat on the grass, looking into George's face, as he reclined close to the edge of the crag.

"Two months!" he repeated. "It has passed like a dream."

"You have not wearied, sir?"

Instead of replying, George rose, and took his seat close by the girl's side.

"Nina."

"Yes."

"Why don't you call me George as you used to do?"

Nina looked into his face as she said slowly, "Because it is different now, sir."

"Why should it be different, Nina? We

are the same—you and I,—what difference should a few years make?"

Nina rose hastily, and stood before him.

"Indeed, you yourself should know what difference it makes. We are not children now. You are the young master, and I—"

"And you, Nina, are what I prize more than anything else in the world," said George, as, standing before her, he took her hands. "Tell me, child, do you care for me? Do you think of me sometimes, as I think of you?—do you—"

He paused. Nina's hand trembled. She looked into her companion's eyes and remained silent.

"Nina," continued George, passionately, as he clasped her round the waist; "speak, darling,—do not turn from me. Answer me now, do you love me, Nina?"

"Love you? yes, indeed I do!" said Nina softly. "But there is little wonder in that. You are the dearest friend—the only friend—I have in the wide world; but I am different to you, and 'tis strange, I think, that you should care for me."

"Nina, do you love me?"

"Indeed, yes," Nina replied; and, looking questioningly into his face, she asked, "Will you always love me?"

"Always, darling!"

For a time she was silent, with her eyes cast on the sea; then she said, half-smiling, half-sad, "Although I am a witch?"

George laughed.

"There is the pledge!" he said, as he kissed her on the lips.

CHAPTER VI.

"IF the suspicion of Nina's unholy propensities had hitherto been somewhat vague and indistinct, it soon became confirmed by one and all beyond the shadow of a doubt; for where could be found the person in this matter-of-fact world who would still hold to a girl's innocence when she had been seen successively, by moonlight, in the company of a bear—a creature half-cow, half-man, and a monster in every lineament, resembling the merman of the caves? Substantial evidence

of these facts was in no way wanting, for the inhabitants of Cruna were armed against the girl *cap-à-pie.* There was old Dunbeg, for instance, ready and willing to swear on the Book that only seven days before, as he stood at nightfall on the Moruig Dubh, he had, himself unseen, watched the girl approach the dreaded Creag-na-Ghoill, and from thence, at a signal from her, had emerged a shadowy monster, which again and again clasped her in its arms. Young Gannon, too, strongly averred that, as he was one night returning in his skiff from the fishing, he had, with his own eyes, seen Nina sitting amidst the rocks on the shore, half reclining in the arms of a man, whose lower extremities bore a striking resemblance to those of a seal. At last the case became so strong that the inhabitants of

Cruna Island felt impelled to lay the facts before their master, and to beg that the witch, and her old familiar, should forthwith be exiled from that land.

To the wonder of the islanders, however, Mr Dunroon exhibited towards the outcasts considerably more leniency than did his people. He was a cautious man, whose nature was utterly impenetrable to the gaze of those benighted islanders. Knowing his nephew's fancy for the girl, he had substantial reason for connecting George Dunroon with these midnight apparitions. To his nephew he said nothing of his suspicions; he knew that George was headstrong, that opposition would be useless; and though he had no idea of allowing matters to proceed as they were, he chose

to gain his end by some surer and more secret means.

A personal interview with Nina he dreaded, partly on account of her reputed skill in the "black arts," and partly because there was something in the girl's face which stirred up the latent sorrow in his soul, and made him very sad. Was it the evil in her eye which caused the man so persistently to shrink from her glance? Or was it some faint familiar gleam which recalled to him the memory of other days? Certain it is, that he had never looked upon Nina's face without some stiffled emotion rising within his breast, so that day after day, month after month, he shunned her, dreading to meet her gaze, and cloaking his shrinking cowardice under the garb of superstition. Whatever he did must be

done secretly, and in a measure through the aid of his people, for in this matter the master did not think it expedient to declare open hostility. Not that he feared Nina only—the girl herself was quite in his power—and were she alone concerned, the matter would be comparatively easy; but of Aileen O'Connor he had a genuine and deep-set terror. He knew that in his youth he had done her manifold wrongs; he remembered how she had left the island vowing vengeance against him; and although at the time the matter had impressed him little, yet since Aileen had returned to the island—an old woman—the master had felt considerably more ill at ease.

From the first the old woman's proceedings had puzzled him; but what astonished

him more than all was, that in her later years she should return and live in the very island which had been the scene of her former misfortunes. Of her life, he knew nothing, but he felt that the old woman nursed the wrongs of the girl, and that still Aileen O'Connor cherished towards him that malignant dislike which he himself had formerly been instrumental in arousing. Dreading, therefore, to mix himself openly in the matter, he determined to feed the superstition of his people, and thereby rid himself of an incumbrance which had been torturing his soul for years.

Silently and keenly he watched his nephew's face, as one who reads a written page, and day by day he saw that the girl's influence over his soul was deepening. Though George had never disclosed to any

mortal man his love for Nina, his uncle had partly solved the young man's secret, and he determined to fully unravel the mystery ere he finally formed his own plans.

Meanwhile George, utterly unmindful of the moral eruption which was working in his uncle's mind, continued to pass his time in careless indolence. Indifferent to all but love, he spent his evenings in Nina's company, looking into her face, and listening to her voice, while the master loomed like a satyr in the background, longing, yet fearing, to put his veto upon the event which he saw approaching.

"Nina," said George, one evening, as, half reclining on a patch of grass which covered the top of a cliff, he looked up into her face, "have you felt happier, darling, since I came?'

Nina laughed; and putting her hand into that which was stretched towards her, asked,—

"How many times is it that you have asked me that?"

"A dozen, I should think."

"Then why do you ask again?"

"Because I like to hear you answer me, I like to listen to your loving voice, Nina, darling. I could sit here looking into your face like this for ever!"

"Indeed, you would be weary."

"Never, child;—I love you far too well;—you are my life, my second nature; with you by my side, I would brave the world."

"You would?"

"Yes, I will swear it if you wish, my darling!"

"But suppose all the world was against

me? It *is* against me, I am crushed down and despised by every one, save you!"

"Pshaw! you know nothing of the world, Nina. What does it matter for the opinion of people like these? You will soon be beyond their power, for you will be their mistress, and then, if you wish it, Nina, we will go south, leave all dark thoughts behind us, and begin life together, happy in our love then, as we are now,"—and he put out both his arms, and, folding them around Nina's waist, drew her nearer to his side.

The dark cliff, on the top of which they sat, loomed in the dusky twilight. Beneath them the mighty ocean surged heavily, and above their heads stretched the heavens, radiant with stars. Around them the shades of night were slowly gathering, all seemed fading away in a soft, vaporous light, no

object was clearly perceptible ; all was vague and shadowy, like things in a dream. For a time the two sat silent, overawed, as it were, by the utter stillness of the scene, for nothing stirred, no breeze was on either land or sea, but ever and anon the owl hooted from its nest in the ivied crag, and the corncrake cried from the corn which grew scarcely a hundred yards behind them. Presently Nina stirred.

" How dark it is getting ! I had forgotten about the night coming, and about my aunt too, who sits in the cabin. I must go, George, I have lingered with you far too long ! "

And Nina leapt to her feet, drew more tightly around her the small checkered handkerchief which covered her neck and shoulders, and turned her back upon the

ocean. Suddenly she started, and caught her companion's sleeve, as she asked, in a suppressed voice,—"What's that?"

"What, Nina?"

"Don't you see that dark figure stealing along the edge of the corn-field? Why, 'tis the master himself!"

"So it is! What can he be doing here, and at this hour, I wonder? Come to see the fairies dance, or to attend a witches' midnight meeting? I'll speak to him."

But Nina kept her hand firmly upon his arm, and held him back.

"Not now, George. See! he does not wish you to do so either."

As she spoke, there was a gentle rustle amongst the corn, and the figure of Mr Dunroon disappeared amidst it from their sight.

George turned to Nina.

"Why, how pale you are," he said, taking her face between his two hands, and holding it up to his. "Are you afraid of my uncle, Nina?"

The girl withdrew a few paces into the shadow.

"No, I do not fear him," she replied, though her voice trembled, "but a strange feeling comes over me when I meet him, such a strange feeling that I cannot understand. I wonder," she added in a lower voice, "will he ever do me any harm?"

George laughed.

"What, Nina, you superstitious too?"

"No, indeed, I am not; but I know the master dislikes me now more than any one of his people!"

"Never fear, little one, he will not dare

to harm you. Why should he? You have lived here undisturbed all these years; why should he hurt you now?"

"I do not know, George," Nina replied softly, "only I would rather that the master was away."

"Tush, Nina, 'tis a foolish fancy that you must not cherish; remember, I am here now to protect you from danger, should any threaten. Now, darling, let me see your face, and tell me you are happy!"

Raising her head, Nina looked into her lover's eyes, and smiled. At that moment she felt supremely glad in the glow of a first youthful passion, and as George drew her near to him, bent above and kissed her cheek, the past shadows and misgivings which had momentarily darkened her soul were dissolved.

Thus the two stood, forgetful of all save themselves, while not many yards behind them loomed a gaunt figure with silvern hair, whose eyes were fixed upon the lovers in malicious dislike, while his lips muttered,—

"She has bewitched him, as I thought, but she shall suffer, she shall suffer!"

. . . . . .

The summer months sped past, and autumn came; the corn was cut and gathered, the sweet scent of newly-mown hay was gone from the air, and Cruna Island lay dark and barren, canopied by a cold, clear, grey sky. The autumn came, and with it came the time for George's departure.

As the days rolled past swiftly, one after another, and that day drew near

when he was to leave the island and return for a time to his studies in the smoky southern city, George grew sad and disheartened, oppressed by a feeling of apprehension, a vague foreshadowing of evil, for which he could not account.

Nightly he sought out Nina, whispering words of comfort in her ear, and drinking them again from her loving lips.

Most willingly would George have renounced all thoughts of departure, and stayed on the lonely island by Nina's side; but that could not be; he must go—struggle against the fates as he might, they still retained the mastery. At last the eve of the dreaded day arrived.

"One little piece of hair, Nina, to kiss to-morrow when I am on the ocean," he asked, as he stood with Nina on the beach

beside her cabin for the last time. Nina drew back.

"No, no!"

"Why, darling?"

"Because—I *am* superstitious, dear; you might never see me again!"

"Nonsense, darling, do not talk so; to-night, let us be happy."

"So we will, if we are never so again. Oh, George, I have been most happy since you came, but it will be weary here without you."

"It will not be for long, Nina. Before you have realised that I am gone, I shall be back again. Promise me not to weary, promise to keep bright and well till I come back to claim you!"

"I will try!"

"Nina, why is it that you linger?"

It was the querulous voice of Aileen O'Connor calling from within the house.

Nina turned.

"I am coming, Aunt Aileen," then she held tight on to George's arm. "'Tis not again that we'll meet, and we must just say good-bye here. I cannot come out and see you go. I could not bear it, with all those people staring at me, and the master, too, maybe. But," she added quickly, "I'll see you from the Creag-na-Ghoill!"

"I shall see you there?"

"Maybe."

"One month, Nina; remember then I shall be back to claim you openly, and dare them all."

Nina shuddered.

"Are you cold, darling?"

"A little; 'tis like winter weather this.

I'm thinking the snow will be here before a month."

"Nina, do you hear? Nina!" The old woman's voice was more querulous than before.

"I must go," said Nina, as she began to move reluctantly away.

George's arms were at once enfolded around her. Gently placing her head on his breast, he kissed her again and again. For a moment she lay pillowed thus, then, with a half-stifled sob, she broke from his arms, and uttering a scarcely audible "Good-bye," ran into the hut.

. . . . . .

The next morning the sails of the cutter, which had brought the young master to Cruna, and which was to take him thence, were early set, and long before midday a

crowd of people were collected on the shore watching the vessel. But as, with her white sails gleaming in the light, the vessel sailed swiftly across the bay, past towering crags and lofty caverns, George became more agitated.

With a keen, passionate glance, he diligently scanned the shore;—as it neared the crag commonly known as the Creag-na-Ghoill, he drew from his pocket a white handkerchief, and holding it on high, waved and waved again. Then looking up, he saw Nina standing above him, on the extreme verge of the crag. In her hand she, too, held a handkerchief, which she waved once, twice—then the handkerchief came fluttering down towards the ocean, as Nina moved back from the crag and was gone.

CHAPTER VII.

"NO sooner had the young man left for the south than Mr Dunroon began to ponder as to the best means of carrying out his plans concerning Nina. Of one thing he was certain, that the girl must be got rid of before George's return, for were the two once again allowed to meet, all hopes of putting an end to the connection would be utterly futile. The scheme, however, seemed by no means easy of accomplishment, for since the master had

thwarted that first insurrection, his people were not over anxious to resume their application.

As a witch, Nina had come to be feared almost as much as her aunt; and such was the superstition of the people, that they dreaded to turn her from the land, lest the curse which she would surely hurl upon their heads should blight their agricultural prospects for that season at least. So the time passed on, the inhabitants of Cruna Island began to look for the young master's return, and still nothing had been done. Mr Dunroon, fuming under his disappointment, looked about him for a means of rescue, but none seemed at hand. What was to be done must be done quickly, or George would be back and spoil all.

The girl once away, the master believed that he would be safe; for, in his excitement, he quite overlooked the fact that if they were once separated at Cruna, the lovers might ultimately meet elsewhere. Seeing that in this matter he could expect little voluntary help from his people, Mr Dunroon resolved to take the matter into his own hands, and gain his end. Thus he remained, silent but watchful, awaiting the opportunity which at last came.

After her first sting of grief was over, Nina O'Connor recommenced her solitary walks. Alone she visited the spots where she had walked with George. Every place associated with him was dear to her. Indeed, the only gratification which she now felt was in brooding over the

spots where they had wandered together; for, as she did so, she almost heard his voice in her ear whispering to her words of love.

Now, if Nina's walks were apparently harmless in character, they soon caused a revolution in the island, for no sooner did the girl emerge into the open air, than a series of calamities fell upon the land. One of Maguire's cows went dry and sickened on the very first day that Nina appeared. Certainly Mr Dunroon had stroked the cow; but then there was nothing in that. The islanders thought 'twas but kindly of the master to notice the beast; it must be the witch's work.

Two days after this incident one of Andy Beg's finest heifers was seen to drop stone dead scarcely a hundred yards

from Nina's feet. The heifer was known to be in perfect health, for only a short time before its death it had eaten a wisp of hay from the master's very hand. A little later, one of the islanders offered to Mr Dunroon a valuable filly which he had for sale. The master was pleased with the animal, but before concluding the bargain he wanted to test the powers of the horse in a ride over the island.

From a crowd of admiring islanders he galloped off along the road which led past the hut of Aileen O'Connor. As he came within sight of the cabin he saw Nina standing by the roadside, watching him with strange earnestness. Scarcely had the pony trotted half a mile beyond her when it was seized with violent quiver-

ings; it foamed at the mouth, gnashed its teeth, threw up its head, and became altogether unmanageable.

The master dismounted, a crowd quickly gathered; in the midst of which stood the owner, furious, and desperate with rage and mortification, as he saw his pony expire before his very eyes. What human soul could continue to doubt the substantiality of a fact when it was brought before him in so very marked a manner?

As the islanders looked upon the animal, they, one and all, became furious as the owner himself. Misfortune after misfortune had fallen upon them, and although the master generously offered at once to pay the price of the pony, and become himself the loser for the deed, the

islanders resolved to take the law into their own hands, and right their private wrongs.

After Mr Dunroon had galloped along the road, and passed from her sight, Nina turned, and began to descend the rocky path which led to her home. Her mind was full of strange misgivings, and the expression of the man's eyes as they had momentarily glanced into her face haunted her.

"He means me no good," she thought; "why does the sight of him fill me with such fear, I wonder? I wish George was here!"

The door of the cabin stood ajar. Nina pushed it open, and entered. Instead of sitting in her accustomed place, Aileen O'Connor stood upon the hearth, dili-

gently pulling together the smouldering turf-sods. In a moment Nina was beside her.

"Shall I sort the fire, Aunt Aileen?"

The ghastly face was turned towards her, and the querulous voice replied,—

"Can you not see that *I* am sorting it?"

Nina remained silent, too well accustomed to the querulous tone to make reply. Presently Aileen placed the tongs on the hearth, and resumed her accustomed seat, while Nina quietly retired to the window recess.

"Where is it you have been, Nina?" asked Aileen at length.

"On the cliffs above," was the gentle reply.

"Ay, you are ever on the cliffs," the

old woman soliloquised; "thinking little of me, though I sit here alone for ever. 'Tis the way of the world—the old are forgotten and neglected. 'Tis ever the way, and I share the fate of the rest."

Advancing from the window, Nina approached her aunt's chair, put a hand on each shoulder, and bent her face towards her.

"Dear Aunt Aileen, shall I read to you?"

"Read to me? Why should you?" was the sharp answer; "that, too, is a burden, I suppose?"

With a low sigh, the girl again retired to the window recess, and resting her arms on the sill, looked out upon the ocean. There was silence for a time, then the old woman spoke again.

"Why are you not reading, Nina?" she asked, and without reply the girl lifted from the shelf the old stained Bible, and began to read aloud, while Aileen crossed her bony hands upon her knee, and fixed her lack-lustre eye upon her tombstone.

Scarcely half-an-hour had passed, and Nina's voice still sounded softly in the room, when a rush of many feet broke the silence without, and suddenly a crowd of people swooped upon the cabin, entirely surrounding it. Before Nina could move, the door was rudely pushed open, and the crowd poured into the room with a fierce cry,—

"The witches! Out with the witches!"

Nina rose to her feet and confronted them, but ere she could utter a word she

was roughly seized by the wrist, forced out of the door, and hemmed round by the crowd without, while on all hands the fiercest denunciations were hissed into her ear. In the midst of the crowd Nina stood confounded, utterly taken aback by the suddenness of the attack; but soon she recovered, and, wrenching herself free, looked defiantly around.

"Stand back!" she cried, "stand back! What have I done to be served like this?"

"Hear the witch! hear the witch!" was roared on every hand.

"Who killed my cow?" asked one, as a savage face confronted her.

"And who killed my horse—my best horse? The devil blast you!"

Nina looked calmly into the eyes which were glaring upon her.

"I know nothing of what you say; but I never worked you harm—no, not one of you."

A fierce, derisive laugh was the reply. Ere the girl could speak again she felt herself lifted from her feet and borne towards the ocean. Wildly she gazed around for help. The faces looming about her were fierce and pitiless, almost demoniac in their savage brutality; the sea of human faces hemmed her in on every hand; but as Nina glanced despairingly around, her eyes fell upon an uncovered head, which was close beside her, mingling with the rest—the white head of Mr Dunroon. Gathering together all her strength, the girl made a tremendous effort, dashed through the crowd, caught the master by the sleeve and cried for mercy.

"Think what it would be to have your own child treated so," she said, "and have some pity for me! Think what it is to turn on a helpless girl and an old woman! —you have power—never let them harm us!"

The man turned from her, muttering fiercely,—

"They shall not harm you, but I'll have no witches on Cruna. You shall go, and never return again!"

Nina's face grew paler, but she retained her hold.

"Turn us from Cruna!" she said, almost breathlessly; "as well kill us outright as send us away into the world, where we have no kindred and no friends! Take back your word, sir, and never do that!"

The man roughly endeavoured to shake her away.

"Let go, I say; I'll have no witches here!"

Still holding on his arm, Nina exclaimed,—

"Why are you so cruel? What have we done that you should serve us so? For years you have hated me. I know it; I have seen it in your face. You are a hard, cruel man. 'Tis you, I know, and only you, who have turned these people against me. But you will not be suffered to go on so. Take care, old man, lest God's curse fall upon you for what you do!"

Nina stood, wild with excitement, her hand convulsively clasped around the master's arm, while her face loomed be-

fore him deathly pale. What was it in the girl's face that penetrated into his heart, and almost softened his hard resolve?

As the man gazed upon those features, his frame quivered through and through; every line, every feature seemed familiar to him, and her bright brown eyes held him for a time with almost magnetic influence. He gazed breathlessly upon her; then, like one suddenly relieved from a terrible spell, he breathed again, covered his eyes with his hand, and cowered before her, muttering under his breath,—

"Begone, begone!"

Suddenly there was a crash and a loud cry. The crowd congregated on the beach uttered a brutal shout of savage glee.

Turning round, Nina beheld a tongue of bright red flame flaring high into the

air. They had set fire to the cabin; the only house which the girl ever remembered was burning to the ground before her eyes. With a wild shriek she threw up her arms, and cried,—

"What have you done—what have you done? My Aunt Aileen—where is my poor aunt?"

In her agony the girl would have rushed through the crowd to the burning cabin, when her arm was caught in a powerful grip, and, looking back, she saw her aunt standing close by—a gaunt, spectral figure in the fiery light. Her ashen cheeks had in them no tinge of colour. Apparently unmoved by the terrible situation, Aileen O'Connor stood still as a statue, with one of her bony hands clasped around Nina's arm, and her lustreless eyes

gazing sternly upon the crouching figure of the man. Nina's heart bounded with joy.

"You are safe!" she cried; "dear Aunt Aileen, you are safe!"

"Yes," replied the old woman in her usual measured, querulous tones, but with a strange light in her eyes. "I am saved for this, to stand on the shore of Cruna, and see the master turn Nina O'Connor from her home." Then turning to the master, who stood before her like one bewitched, she said in harsh grating tones, — "*My* time has come. I have waited long, but it has come at last. You remember the last words of Aileen, the crushed down, heart-broken Aileen O'Connor?" Then pointing with her long thin finger towards Nina, she cried, — "Hurl your curses

upon *her* as you hurled them upon *me*. Crush her, despise her, thrust her away as you did awhile ago; the very sight of her is hateful to you; she knows it, and I know it. She hates you, she despises you, for through *you*, remember through *you*, she is a wretched outcast!"

The old man stood speechless, while the death-like eyes of the woman were fixed with a hungry light upon his face. Closer the crowd pressed around with furious faces, crying in Irish,—

"She is mad, she will bewitch the master, cast her away!"

The girl clung wildly to her aunt, and turned her face upon the people.

"You shall not harm her," she cried. "Aunt—dear Aunt Aileen, come away,

we will go, we will leave this hateful place, and these cruel people, and we will never come back again."

As she looked into the girl's face, the old woman uttered a hard, cold laugh.

"See how she clings to me," she cried, almost fiercely, as she turned her eyes again upon Mr Dunroon. "To *me*, though I have scarcely given her a kind word, a kind look, she clings to me, and you she hates and loathes. Think of this, remember this, on your dying bed!"

"Woman, what do you mean?" cried the master. "Get you gone, I say, and never come here again. Curse on the hour when your face came first to torture me!"

The stern face of the old woman broke into a ghastly smile.

"I am going," she said, "but *she* is

going with me. The girl is with the old woman, whilst you are left childless. If I am an outcast, she is an outcast too; remember that!"

"Curses on you both! what is the girl to me?"

The old woman looked almost triumphantly into his face as she replied,—

"Think on *that* when she is gone away!"

Dunroon turned fiercely from her.

"Take them away!" he cried; "turn them out! Drag them from my sight!"

The crowd again pressed around the two, and Nina clung close to her aunt as if to protect her, as she whispered,—

"Come away, Aunt Aileen, come away. He is a cruel man!"

Yielding to the girl, Aileen O'Connor moved slowly down the beach, her gaunt

figure straight as an arrow, and her head towering above the heads of those who pressed around her. Slowly the night shadows were gathering around them, the sky, covered here and there with thick masses of cloud, loomed heavily above the earth. On the distant mountain tops patches of snow gleamed in the light. Surrounded by the jeering crowd the two figures moved slowly oceanward. Her face pale as death, and her eyes bright and tearless, Nina walked along half-dazed, half-stupefied, deaf to the taunts which were constantly hissed into her ear. Once she paused, and looked back long and lovingly at the spot where she had spent so many years of her life. No vestige of the hut remained, but a mass of smouldering black ruins were scattered at the base of the rock.

At the sight, her face became paler still, her brow contracted, her lips compressed, but without a sigh she turned and walked in silence until the two reached the edge of the sea. There they paused. An unforeseen difficulty arose.

The islanders, who were so anxious to banish the outcasts, seemed, nevertheless, most unwilling to convey them from thence, fearing that in their spite the two women might exert their evil influence over any smack which they boarded, and so cause its destruction.

The scene now became more boisterous than before, and the two unfortunates would probably have sustained some injury from the people had the uproar not been suddenly stopped. The skipper of a yawl, which lay in the bay prepared for starting,

generously volunteered, out of pity, to take the women on board. The ship's boat was waiting on the shore, and into it Ailcen O'Connor stepped without a word. Nina should have followed, but suddenly she turned, faced the master, who had followed them down, and fell upon the shore at his feet.

"Oh, sir, have pity!" she cried; "maybe you have a kindly heart after all; never turn us away homeless and friendless as we are!"

The man thrust her away.

"Away with you!" he cried, and Nina was seized roughly, cast into the boat, and ere she had finally recovered from her dazed amazement, she was seated on the deck of the yawl, which was sailing swiftly out of the harbour. Silently the girl sat with her

eyes fixed wildly upon the shore, as the vessel struck out to the open sea, and Cruna Island faded away into a mist. So concentrated had her gaze become that she was blind to all else, utterly unconscious that another vessel, a large cutter, with all her sails set and filled, was ploughing swiftly through the water, and making straight for the land which they had left.

CHAPTER VIII.

SCARCELY an hour had passed since the yawl had faded from view, and the crowd was still congregated on the beach, when the cutter, which had passed the yawl in the open water outside Cruna, rounded the northern point of the island, and sailed swiftly into the bay. No sooner had it come to a safe anchorage than a boat put off, and pulled towards the shore, and the islanders beheld, seated in the stern, none other than the young master himself.

George had not been expected so soon,

yet his sudden appearance caused no consternation in the minds of the islanders. They knew nothing of the relations between him and Nina.

The master himself had left the beach, and returned to his house, and as yet knew nothing of his nephew's arrival. Eagerly the islanders crowded to the water's edge to welcome the young man home. However, he paid little or no attention to their salutes. They soon noticed that something unusual had occurred to bring him back so soon amongst them; for George wore a broad, black band upon his hat, and his face was whiter than the foam of the sea. Leaping out on to the shingle, he hurriedly passed through the ranks of men surrounding him.

"What vessel was that we passed yonder?" he asked, without raising his eyes from the ground.

"'Twas a yawl, sir, that came from the south a week ago, and is bound homeward."

"They must have been mad to sail out to-night. There's a storm brewing, and an awful sea rising out in the open."

The islanders glanced meaningly into each other's faces, but, without once looking towards them, George hurried on direct for his uncle's house. His manner was singularly agitated, his brow knit, his pale face troubled by an expression of mental agony. On reaching the house he quietly entered, and, walking along the lobby, paused before a half-

open door. The room which it revealed was cast in heavy shadow, but through the dim light could be faintly seen the figure of Mr Dunroon, seated upon the hearth in a great arm-chair, with his bowed head resting upon his hand, and his eyes bent upon the ground, while the bright firelight fell upon his furrowed face and silver hair. The expression of his face was more peevish, the features more pinched than ever, and as he sat there in the gleam of the firelight, he looked worn-out and wretched with sorrow and years. Advancing into the room, George paused beside the chair, and placed his hand on the old man's shoulder, at which the master rose to his feet, and faced him, exclaiming,—

"George! so soon!" Then, as his eyes

fell upon his nephew's face and dress, he asked in a softer tone,—"What has happened, my boy? Is it ill news that has brought you back to Cruna?"

George looked steadfastly into the old man's face, and, still keeping his hand on his shoulder, said quietly,—

"Good news, and ill news, uncle. My mother is dead."

"Dead!" echoed Mr Dunroon faintly; then his dull eyes grew almost tender in expression as he looked in his nephew's face.

"You are friendless now, George," he said, "friendless as I am; but we will keep together now, my boy. Cruna shall be your home."

George half turned away.

"Cruna shall never belong to me," he

said; "you are not friendless, as you suppose, uncle, for your own child still lives."

A quiver passed through Dunroon's frame.

"My child!" he exclaimed. "George, I have no child, she was taken from me before I saw her; ay, eighteen years ago she was drowned at sea!" As he spoke, the old man's voice rang with a low wail of sorrow.

"She was not drowned," continued George, "for she was never on the ship! Listen, uncle. At the last moment your wife started alone, leaving her child with my mother. The vessel went down, and you believed the mother and child were drowned; but the child was safe in the south. My mother never forgave you, uncle, for refusing to help my father out

of some trouble; she declared that through your hardness you caused his death; so when she heard that you were grieving for your child, she thought little of your suffering, and was only bent on making me your heir."

George paused. The old man trembled; but, without raising his head, he merely said in a low voice,—

"Go on, my boy; go on!"

"You can partly guess the rest, uncle. I was sent here to console you, and your own child was detained. My mother kept her for a few years, but fearing the secret might ooze out, she at length entrusted her to the care of a woman-servant in the house. That woman was Aileen O'Connor. The two were sent away together to the States of America, and for a time nothing

was heard of them. Now, uncle, mark the terrible decrees of Providence. Some years ago these same two arrived at Cruna, and ever since then your own child has been living near you, like any common peasant girl!"

Up to this moment the old man had sat silent, but as George uttered the last words, the dull eyes flashed with an unearthly light; the features grew more contracted. Rising to his feet he faced his nephew, and in a quivering voice exclaimed,—

"Nina O'Connor!"

"Yes, uncle; Nina O'Connor!"

Mr Dunroon's hand clenched, and his face grew pale as death.

"It is false!" he exclaimed. "*She* is no child of mine!"

Amazed at this unexpected change, George stood for a moment utterly speechless; then he stepped forward, and put his hand on the old man's shoulder.

"I tell you it is true, uncle," he replied. "My own mother confessed it to me on her death-bed!"

"I say it is false, George!" cried the master vehemently; "every word of it is false! The girl is no kin of mine, but of hers — of that accursed woman — Aileen O'Connor. Didn't I know she'd bring me no good? Didn't I know that evil would come with her? I felt it—I knew it. But I will thwart her, I tell you, even if the devil himself is leagued with her against me."

"Uncle," said George, "do not rave so, think of it sensibly; my mother has done

you the greatest wrong, but you must forgive her now, and rejoice at getting back your child."

"She is not my child!" cried the old man, turning fiercely upon his nephew. "Don't you hear what I say, George? she is no child of mine! But they are all against me, and you have joined them too—*you* above all. Haven't I treated you well, George, and cherished you like my own? and didn't I mean to leave you the island, yes, every acre of it? and yet you can turn upon me like this; ay, heap sorrow and degradation upon the head of your benefactor!"

With a plaintive wail, the old man sank again into his chair, while the wind, which had been slowly rising, shrieked fiercely around the house, and a vivid flash of

light darting through the pane for a moment brightly illuminated the room. George stood irresolute, with his eyes fixed upon the old man, who sat still, cowering in the chair, with his broad hand tremblingly pressed upon his face. For a moment both remained silent, then George, advancing to his uncle's chair, said quietly,—

"Uncle, have you not wronged your child enough that you must continue to do so now? All her life she has been crushed down by you, her father, from whom she should have sought protection. But you shall not continue to commit a crime while I can prevent it. Nina shall no longer be an outcast, for I will bring her to her home!"

Raising his head, Mr Dunroon gazed into

his nephew's face with a dogged look of triumph.

"That is beyond you, George," he said quietly; "the girl is gone!"

"Gone!" ejaculated the young man, rising excitedly to his feet.

"Yes, she is beyond your reach now," said Dunroon; "she sailed away this very night, and, by God's help, she will never tread these shores again."

In a moment George turned almost savagely upon him.

"What have you done?" he exclaimed; "to what have your passions led you at last? You have sent your child to her death. Do not stand there cursing her when she may be sinking to her doom, but ask God to forgive you for your cruelty and shame."

As George paused, there was a terrible

crash, the wind shrieked more shrilly, and the lightning flashed into his face. Appalled at last the old man shrank away like a frightened child. Despite his savage refutation of the statement made to him, Mr Dunroon in his heart was credulous of its probable truth. Now he remembered the tender feelings which a glance from Nina's eyes had awakened in his soul, and which, to cover his secret fears, he had attributed to the "evil eye;" and, in looking back at the girl's face, he almost seemed to see in her the image of his lost wife. Now he remembered, too, the wild words which Aileen O'Connor had uttered in his ear only that very night, as she stood with the girl on the beach; how with her bony finger she had pointed to the girl, and exclaimed with savage glee,—

"See how she clings to *me*, while *you* she hates and loathes!"

All now seemed to grow clear. He felt the story was true. The two women had wrought their revenge; for twenty years he had been desolate, and in the end he had, perhaps, compassed the death of his only child. Frantic and heart-sick, the old man screamed out in pain,—

"George," he cried, "be silent. Aileen O'Connor has worked her ruin. I never meant to kill her. Spare me, for God's sake, spare me! Have I not suffered enough?"

"And has *she* not suffered, uncle?" George asked. "Promise me now, if she is spared to-night, that you will repair all the wrong you have done her."

"I promise anything you wish, only

leave me in peace," the old man cried in madness, as, quivering through and through, he turned from his nephew and sank silently into his chair. George left the room and the house, and the door shutting behind him with a crash, locked him out into the storm.

CHAPTER IX.

"DAZED and half-stupefied, like one in a half-dream, Nina continued to sit where they had placed her on the deck of the yawl, with her eyes strained in the direction of Cruna Island. The breeze, which had brought them from Cruna, grew less and less, until, when they had left the island some six miles behind them, it entirely died away. The water seemed throbbing as with some hidden trouble, — black, glassy, and direful, it washed against

the sides of the vessel with a dreary moan. Overhead the floating masses of black cloud were congregated into one thick mass, which loomed down upon the surface of the sea. The air was full of a mysterious heat, which became almost stifling in its oppressiveness.

For miles and miles away the points of the land loomed clearly visible, the very cattle standing distinct upon the heights, and lowing softly, answering each other, while the sheep were bleating from height to height.

Like a lazy log upon the water lay the yawl, rolled this way, that way, by the liquid mountains which rose around her, while in the bow the men stood whispering together amongst themselves, gazing suspiciously at the lowering sky.

Nina still sat silent, while close behind her was Aileen O'Connor, looking stern and forbidding, with her hands crossed, and her bloodless lips compressed. Gazing longingly at the land which they had left, Nina remained motionless. At length, overcome by extreme excitement and fatigue, her eyes closed, her head rested against the bulwark, she passed her arm around the side rigging of the ship, and fell into a half-fainting doze. She had remained thus for some time, when she was suddenly and violently awakened. The vessel gave a tremendous lurch, throwing her forward upon the deck, almost into the sea. In a moment she was caught by one of the sailors and lifted to her feet. She opened her eyes and looked around. To her amaze-

ment, it had grown perfectly dark, no single landmark was visible. The wind, which had risen, whistled shrilly amidst the rigging. With a clatter of feet the men hurried to and fro upon the deck, and the vessel, with all her sails well reefed, was tearing along through a swiftly-rising sea.

Nina looked for her aunt. She was standing in the stern, holding on by a part of the shrouds, her head uncovered, a black shawl drawn tightly around her shoulders, her grey hair blown wildly about her face, and her eyes steadfastly fixed before her.

"Clear away, mistress, if 'tis not into the sea that you want to go."

And as the sailor pushed roughly past, Nina scrambled back to her place, and took a firm hold of the rigging.

She was just in time. The yawl gave a great plunge, which sent the men staggering along the deck; and, simultaneously, a huge wave arose, and dashed foaming upon the deck, sweeping all that lay there into the sea.

Drenched now from head to foot, Nina clung still tighter, and watched the darkness of the sea. Black and angry arose the huge waves, crested with boiling surf, which hissed and foamed upon them, and, being caught up by the wind, was scattered in the air like drifting smoke, while the ship plunged headlong into the ocean, now rising, suspended in the air, then plunging down, lost for a moment in a mass of sea smoke and hissing foam.

Above, the heavens loomed threateningly.

Thick black masses of cloud, rudely rent asunder by the rising wind, were shot swiftly across the sky, while in the west, vivid rays of light played momentarily, cutting up the clouds and flashing down upon the sea; the thunder crashed and roared overhead.

Around was darkness impenetrable, shutting out the land, veiling all save the flashing foam which flew about the ship. At the wheel the steersman stood, buttoned to the throat, with his shiny cap pulled low over his anxious eyes.

"Where are we?" asked Nina. But before the man could reply there was a sudden rush.

"Lower the peak!" cried a voice, and no sooner was the order obeyed than a wild gust struck the vessel, tearing fiercely at the dripping sail as

if to rend it into shreds, while the water washed in a stream about the deck. There was a crash. As the gust lessened in violence the ship righted herself, quivering from stem to stern, and one or two rope-ends dangled in the air.

"Three blocks gone; ease her up, or we'll lose every stitch."

"Can't you make out her bearings, skipper?" asked the steersman.

"No; keep her a-head; I fancy we're in the open." The skipper disappeared, while the steersman muttered—

"Why the devil did he come out on this h— of a coast without a compass? Who on earth could see through that blackness? Saugh!" as a wave curled above him and washed him from head to foot; "the

storm's growing. Maybe the — witches mean to drown us; anyhow, we stand a poor chance of reaching land this night."

Every moment the wind increased; wildly it shrieked around the vessel, fiercely it tore at the fragments of dripping sail, while with almost bare poles, dripping as she arose from the waves, the yawl plunged on. Throughout all this tumult, still holding on by the side rigging of the ship, the old woman kept her place. Again and again the waves arose and dashed about her, drenching her from head to foot, and almost sweeping her into the sea. Her hands were bruised with clinging, her grey hair was blown about by the wind, and her cheeks were cut by the blinding sea scum which was ever dashed rudely into her face. The shrieking wind was bitter,

the water was almost frozen upon the deck, but Aileen O'Connor seemed indifferent to the elements; her face was set, her lack-lustre eyes retained their hard, cold look; yet ever as they fell upon Nina, who, drenched and shivering, clung wildly to the vessel's side, the hard, cold gleam of the face softened, as her bloodless lips muttered,—

"*He* did it!—*he* did it!"

Suddenly a vivid flash of light illuminated the whole ocean. It seemed that the heavens had been torn apart, and, blazing with lurid light, fallen down upon the sea. Almost simultaneously there was a tremendous crash; the vessel trembled from stem to stern, quivered like a frightened thing, and again plunged onward. The seamen shrieked. Nina covered her

eyes with her hand, and when she looked again all had become dark. The skipper stood calling loudly to his men. On the deck splinters of wood and sail lay scattered, while several men were employed in cutting the wreck away. The mizen-mast had been shivered to splinters by the lightning flash, and one man, struck to death, washed from the deck into the sea.

Bereft now of mizen-mast, and scarcely a shred of sail left upon her pole, the vessel laboured on, though the violence of the storm seemed slowly to increase. Nina, growing sick with fear, clung tighter to the bulwarks; while the waves swept over her again and again. Eagerly she tried to penetrate the darkness, and catch a glimpse of the faces of the sailors in vain. Again and again she asked some question, but

received no reply. The men rushed here and there, clinging to the ropes as they went, heedless of all save the growing peril. Quivering through and through, drenched from mast to stern, the great yawl tossed like a toy upon the waves. For a moment she was suspended high in the air, on the crest of a breaking wave; then, with a deafening crash, she plunged down as if into the very depths of the ocean. Simultaneously then was a cry, a rush, a roar of breaking waves, and a heavy surging sound, and above the din arose the voice of the skipper,—

"Man the pumps!"

Instantly some of the sailors rushed to obey the command; while others remained to tear down the last remaining shred of sail.

"She's sinking!" cried one of the men; "we had better leave her and take to the boat?"

"Ghost of a chance you'd have in the boat in this sea. Keep to the pumps; maybe we'll save her."

"Never; the water's knee-deep in the hold—"

The rest was lost. A shrieking squall swept down upon the ship, burying her side in the sea; a wave broke directly above her, and fell with a roar upon her deck, then poured again into the ocean. Tremblingly the vessel righted herself, and the skipper, with the water running off him in a stream, turned again to the helmsman. He was gone, swept away into the sea, and the ship was drifting helplessly upon the waves. Another man

sprang to his place, but too late. Beaten about like a cork upon the ocean, utterly unmanageable, with a stream of water pouring into her hold, the vessel drifted on to destruction. The skipper crept anxiously along the deck, and sought his men, and at his approach there was a cry,—

"She's foundering!—the water's rising; we cannot keep her afloat much longer."

"Lower the boat!" the skipper cried hastily; "'tis our only chance."

The pumps were at once deserted, and there was a rush on deck while the boat was being lowered into the sea.

Up to this Nina had remained silent, dreading to speak, afraid to move, lest a wave should suddenly break above her and sweep her from the deck. But when she saw the crew about to desert the

vessel, the dread of being overlooked and left there to die overcame all her other fears, and cautiously leaving her place, she seized the arm of a sailor who was hurrying by—

"Wait," she said; "for heaven's sake help me to get my aunt over yonder to the boat!"

The man roughly shook her away.

"Hold off, mistress; the old witch must take her chance. Every man for himself."

He rushed past her on to the other side of the vessel, and disappeared over into the boat. The girl crept back to where her aunt stood, took her round the waist, and said hurriedly,—

"Come, Aunt Aileen, quick, before another wave breaks, or we shall be left!"

Strengthened in her excitement, she dragged the old woman along the deck to the spot where the boat was lowered. All the crew had descended; the boat was about to push off, and the skipper, who alone stood on the deck, was preparing to leap in, when Nina relinquished her aunt and seized him, forcibly holding him back.

"Let us come first," she cried; "hand my aunt down."

The man turned.

"There's no room there," he said; "the boat's full enough, and I must look to my crew."

"Oh, never leave us, never leave us here!" Nina cried, holding him tightly by the arm, but he roughly pushed her away.

"Ghost of a chance we'd have with the

pair of *you* on board; we must look to ourselves, I tell you;" and, as if to quiet his own conscience qualms, he mentally added, "maybe, after all, the folks were right, and, if they're a couple of witches, they'd surely work us more harm; better leave them where they are."

In a moment he leapt over the side into the boat, and loudly commanded the men to push off.

Frantic with terror, Nina screamed aloud,—

"Come back! take my aunt; only take her, and I will stay. Have pity, for God's sake, have pity!"

Her prayers were lost. Heedless of all save their own safety, the men pulled away into the breaking waves; one moment more, and they were lost to view, while

speechless, terror-stricken, and sick, Nina and Aileen O'Connor stood alone on the deck of the foundering vessel.

For a moment the girl stood gazing with terrified eyes at the spot where the boat had disappeared, then, seeing that her only hope had gone, she turned, and without a word, crouched down on the deck beside her aunt. Silent, speechless, motionless, the old woman sat upon the drenching boards, her gaunt figure drawn up straight, and her lack-lustre eyes fixed vacantly upon the sea.

Seemingly impenetrable to all outward sensations, she sat like a figure of stone, but when the girl crouched down beside her, she turned her head, and almost instinctively her bony arm was reached forth, and clasped around Nina's neck. Never before, in the whole course of her life, had

Nina felt that hard hand rest so gently upon her, never before had she received one sign of affection from the stern woman whom she called her aunt.

Always sullen and bitter, the woman had ever repelled any outward show of love in the child, who, from her infancy, had lived under strict restraint, uncared for, and with none but the gloomy woman for whom to care.

When Nina felt the hard hand pressed so softly around her neck, her excitement was wrought to its fullest pitch. Clasping her arms around her aunt's waist, she burst into hysterical tears.

"Oh aunt, dear Aunt Aileen," she cried, "it was cruel of them to leave you here; why did they not take you, and leave me here alone?"

Immediately the old woman withdrew her arm, and broke out in her wonted querulous tones.

"Why should they take me? Isn't it as well for an old woman like me to die?" Then, as Nina remained silent, she continued in a more excited tone, "Why should you blame them, when they are not to blame? Would they have brought us out here? Would they have exiled us from Cruna? 'Tis no fault of theirs that we die, but of him, and him alone, who placed us in their hands!"

"He was cruel, too," said Nina softly; "he is a bad man, but maybe he never thought of this; he could not foresee the storm."

"Could he not?" cried the old woman fiercely; "but I tell you he could, Nina.

'Twas what he meant, for us to die together. He has worked it out at last, he has brought vengeance upon himself, if he only knew!"

"Aunt Aileen," cried the girl.

The old woman started, drew up her gaunt figure to its full height, grasped the rigging with one hand, and with the other pointed to the flashing sky.

"If I called God's vengeance upon him," she cried, "if God's wrath descended upon his head, he could not be more crushed down than he is; and who has done this, but I, Aileen O'Connor, the girl whom he ruined, the girl whom he hunted from his dominions, and cast away, with an old man, to starve in the southern land! Ay!" she continued, half muttering to herself, "little good has come to him; God's curse has

followed him; and now this is the end."

Nina clasped her arms still tighter around the old woman's waist, as she cried, "Aunt, dear Aunt Aileen, speak to me, kiss me once, only once; the vessel is sinking, we have not long to live!"

Turning her dreary face towards the girl, the old woman looked steadfastly into her eyes.

"We shall die," she said, in her solemn, querulous voice. "Yes, we shall die together. Did I not say so? The child follows the old woman, and shares the same fate. Did I not tell him so, Nina?"

Trembling and terror-stricken Nina stood before the gaunt form. The vacant eyes looked wild and wandering, the pale grey face gleamed ghastly.

As she looked upon the figure and listened to the wild wandering words, Nina felt afraid, for she thought, "The fear of death is maddening her, she does not know what she says," and as the girl glanced at the breaking waves, felt the piercing wind, saw the impenetrable darkness gather thicker around her, and the sky flash down, as it were, upon her head, she cried,—

"It was cruel to send her here, cruel, cruel." Then stretching forth her arms, she added,—"Aunt Aileen, nevér talk like that; try to forgive him now as I do."

"You, child; what have you to forgive? Every sorrow that he heaped upon you will return like a firebrand to burn him; little did he know what he did when he turned *you* away."

"Oh! what do you mean?" cried Nina, still clinging to her aunt. "If there is some secret, tell me now, Aunt Aileen, before we die."

"Tell you? Yes, I will tell you, though I know you will turn from me, and hate me for it. But I am not solely to blame; 'tis through him I have injured you. I never meant you harm, Nina, all I wanted was to be revenged on him. My heart was full of hatred to the last. For it I sacrificed your life, and now, I have wrought your death."

White and terrified Nina listened in wonder.

"What does it all mean? Aunt Aileen, tell me the truth!" she cried; but ere the old woman could reply, the yawl plunged down, buried in the water, then, rising

again, suspended in the air on the crest of a wave, she descended again with a crash that shook her through. The waves arose and washed about her, but she remained split in twain, firmly fixed on unseen rocks, her stern raised in the air, and her bow plunged forward.

It seemed that in one moment more the hull of the ship would divide and sink beneath the waves. In the stern, the girl and the old woman sat hand-in-hand, as with wild eyes and pale face, Nina looked at the splitting planks of the vessel.

Presently she spoke.

"Aunt Aileen!"

The querulous voice replied sharply,—

"Why should you call me aunt? You are no kin of mine; *he* is your father!"

"*He!* whom?" asked Nina, starting to her feet.

"He who sent you here—he who shunned you, and cursed you for a witch; the master of Cruna."

Nina stood gazing into the old woman's face in awe and wonder, while softly beneath her breath, and with clay-cold lips, she repeated,—

"*He! my father!*"

"Yes," repeated the old woman, as some of the old wicked light gleamed again in her eyes. "He is your father, Nina—you are nothing to me; body and soul, you belong to *him*. How bravely he cursed his daughter, did he not, his only child?" then looking at the girl who still stood motionless as marble, she continued,—

"Turn from me, Nina, curse me now as I deserve, and make me feel that I am alone. You are *his* child; flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone. Oh, Nina, how I hated you when I thought of this; how my heart turned against you. I almost believed you were like him. I was hard and unkind when I looked into your pretty face and knew you belonged to *him;* and I kept you, I clutched you tighter, to keep you from him, when I thought how happy he would be if he knew. Nina, I did this—I have wronged you—made you an instrument to my revenge; now turn from me, curse me as I deserve, and let me die!"

As the old woman paused, the girl threw up her arms and clasped them around the withered neck.

"O God! why did I not die before you told me this?" she cried. "Aunt, dearest aunt, come closer—whisper—tell me it is not true!"

"It *is* true, Nina," the old woman replied. "Why do you cling to me like this?"

"Because I love you," the girl replied. "Dear Aunt Aileen, I have always loved you, but I cannot care for that man. Think of that—think of all that has passed, and pity me. O God, have pity! Aunt, do not turn away; kiss me now, and say you love me too!"

A new light filled the old woman's eyes; the grim expression of the face grew softer, and the hard lines about the mouth more gentle as Aileen looked down at the clinging form. For a moment she stood irresolute, then, trembling like a leaf, she bent her

head, put her arms around the girl's neck, and kissed her lips.

"I do love you," she murmured, "though God knows I never thought to love *his* child. God forgive me, God forgive me!"

Ardently Nina returned the cold caress, then with her arms about the old woman's neck she cried,—

"Dear Aunt Aileen, pray God to forgive them all, and—"

Suddenly the vessel gave a great lurch. Nina caught the rigging; Aileen O'Connor was cast flat upon the deck. There was a roar of breaking waves; the hull of the ship was split in two. Heeling forward, the forepart was soon buried in the foam, and that upon which Nina stood shook and trembled, and seemed to be heeling over into the waves.

With a face pale as death Nina looked at the inrushing sea; then she closed her eyes and fell upon her knees, clasping her arms around the old woman's neck with passionate sobs. Above the waves broke, and around the sea washed, with a never-ceasing roar, while on the deck, covered with blinding foam, the two figures lay locked in a last embrace.

CHAPTER X.

"WITH dawn came calm. On the shore of Cruna Island the waters washed with dreary murmurs, while the peaks of the dripping crags which overhung the sea were enshrouded in a thick white mist, which loomed over the surface of the ocean, utterly concealing every object from view. Throughout the night, George Dunroon had wandered on the shore like a restless spirit, but no sooner did the dawn begin to break than he rowed out to the cutter which, on the

previous night, had brought him home, and began making hasty preparations to set out in search of Nina. On the top of the Creag-na-Ghoill, which commanded a view of the surrounding ocean, a crowd of islanders were collected, while others stood on the shore, studying the movements of the young master, and uttering various commentaries upon his actions.

"What's the good of it, at all, at all?" said one; "sure the colleen's safe enough. That captain wasn't one to weather a storm, but he'd just run the yawl into Storport harbour, and keep her safe till morning."

"Into Storport, is it?" returned another; "how could he do that, and the wind blowing due north-west? No, no, she's either run south before the wind or foundered in open water."

Suddenly there was a cry from the crowd on the top of the crag, and a dozen fingers were pointed seaward. For a moment the mist had scattered, and had disclosed to their view a momentary glimpse of some dark mass looming far out on the sea. George was at once summoned, but ere he had reached the spot the mist had again condensed, and again hung heavy over the waters. As the dawn advanced, it seemed to grow more dense, although here and there it became scattered like sea-smoke. Suddenly, however, the whole mass began to stir, and in one thick cloud it slowly lifted like a curtain from the sea. As it ascended, the surface of the ocean became clearly visible, and all now saw distinctly a huge black mass fixed between the sharp teeth of a reef of rocks, which

arose black and jagged several miles from the shore. As George looked, his head turned dizzy, his heart stood still with anticipation.

The hull of a small vessel of some sort was split in twain on the rocks, the bow being plunged forward in the waves, and the stern raised in the air.

George turned to the crowd.

"You think it's the yawl?" he asked in a low voice.

"It looks like her, sir."

"Get the boat," replied George; "we'll row out."

"Sure 'tis no use, yer honor; there's no living soul aboard that wreck!"

"Get the boat," commanded George again, "before it is too late!"

Without another word the islanders ran

forward to launch the skiff, while George followed them, glancing continually seaward. The prediction of the people seemed correct; no living soul appeared on board the wreck; nothing was visible but the black hull itself. George's heart sank, but he did not despair. Nina might be below, he thought; she might be in some corner of the vessel hidden from his sight. Impatiently he urged on the men, as, sitting in the stern of the skiff, he directed her course towards the reef.

As the boat left the shore and drew nearer the rocks, George, still watching the wreck, thought he could distinguish a figure on the deck. As he approached closer, however, his view of the deck was cut off, the stern of the yawl having heeled over, and her broadside

being presented to the surf. The sea was calm; but near the rocks the water was sucked up and cast back so violently, that approach was perilous. Keeping a distance from the crag, the men pulled cautiously round, and were about to cling on to the wreck when there was a sudden tumult and a cry,—

"Pull for your lives!"

The skiff had darted only a short distance from the wreck when the yawl separated. The fore part, plunging entirely forward, sank beneath the water. The stern quivered, and seemed about to follow. George rose, prepared to jump overboard, when he was forcibly retained in his seat, and the skiff once more pulled towards the wreck. Pausing beneath the stern, one of the men threw up a grapnel;

and George, divested of boots and coat, seized the rope, and before he could be stopped, was swinging in the air, ascending the rope which hung from the vessel.

A minute after, he stood on the deck of the yawl. There he paused, gazing upon a sight which froze the blood in his veins. Lying flat on the deck, her black clothes drenched and clinging feebly about her form, and her grey hair scattered like drift-weed around her, was Aileen O'Connor, stone-dead. Sitting close beside this figure, with her eyes fixed vacantly upon the ghastly face, was another—living. Drenched too from head to foot—her face pale as that of the corpse beside her, her long hair hanging about her shoulders; one hand, bruised and bleeding, supported her chin; the other hung listlessly by her

side. She sat motionless, like one in a total trance. For a moment George stood chained to the spot, gazing in speechless agony at the figures; then he walked forward, fell upon his knees, and clasped Nina passionately in his arms. The girl did not speak nor start; but quietly raising her eyes, she looked into his face with a vacant, bewildered stare.

One by one the islanders clambered upon the deck, and stood looking upon the scene, and into their faces Nina glanced with the same vacant look in her eyes. Lifting the corpse of Aileen O'Connor, they conveyed it to the skiff, and quietly and unresistingly Nina followed. When the boat reached land the girl stood on the shore like one in a dream; but George put his arm around her and led her home.

For many weeks after that day the girl lay raving in fever, hovering on the brink of death. Anxiously George watched in the sick-room; while Mr Dunroon, with bowed head and gloomy countenance, walked the house in sullen silence. After prolonged suffering, Nina gradually began to improve; and as she slowly regained her health, the vacant look which had haunted George began to fade from her eyes, and a more intelligent light illuminated them, until, at last, she fully recovered the reason which she had temporarily lost. The expression of her face was sadder than it had been; her voice was gentle and very tender. The awful anguish which she had endured had left its mark.

For a time she was utterly unable to shake

off the morbid depression which weighed upon her. George was most constant in his attentions, and, as Nina gradually improved under his care, he at length pressed her to fulfil the promise which she had made to him long before. After much hesitation, Nina consented. The two were married, and forthwith took up their abode in the gloomy dwelling of the Master of Cruna.

True to his promise, Mr Dunroon recognised Nina as his daughter, though he never exhibited towards her a father's affection, but submitted in sullen silence to his fate. Yet Nina's friendliness gradually gained some influence over his hard nature, and he began to grow more gentle in his bearing as years went by.

After it had been conveyed to the land, and received the sacred rites of the Church,

the body of the old woman was buried near the sands of the surging sea. The grass grows green above her, the sea-smoke dashes over her head, and the stone upon which, during life, she had been wont to gaze, at length marks the last resting-place of

AILEEN O'CONNOR."

CHAPTER XI.

AS I finished the story, the book fell upon my knee, and my eyes rested sadly upon the dying fire.

I had been strangely interested, for the characters were so faintly disguised, that, after the first few pages, I had had little difficulty in recognising them ; I understood now the meaning of that light which had so puzzled me as I had gazed into my hostess's sorrowful face ; I understood now the look of intense pain which

had crossed her countenance when I lightly spoke of witchcraft; and the interest which I already felt for this beautiful creature and her husband increased tenfold.

I got little sleep that night, and, shortly after daybreak, I rose, weary with courting slumber.

I was the first to descend the stairs, so I quietly let myself out of the house, and went for a stroll towards the sea.

Some time later, as I was returning to the house, I met Nora.

"Have you read the story?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Well, then, I needn't tell you to be careful not to talk about witchcraft again. It's twenty years since all that happened, and yet Nina feels as strongly about it as ever, I think. . . . Do you see that grave-

yard on the hillside? old Mr Dunroon is buried there; and, if you will come with me, I'll show you the old woman's tomb."

We walked away, and soon came to it,—a quaintly-fashioned tombstone set in the earth close to the sea. On it was traced, in letters which were fast wearing away,—

AILEEN O'CONNOR,

DROWNED AT SEA ON THE 30TH DAY OF JANUARY 18—.

May She rest in Peace.

The stone was in good order, and evidently tended by careful hands.

"Nina hadn't much cause to love her," said Nora; "but you see she cares for her even after so many years."

We turned to retrace our steps towards the house; presently Nora paused again, and drew my attention to a heap of stones.

"That is where the hut stood," she said, "the hut that poor Nina saw burnt to the ground while she was being driven out to sea,—it is the memory of that time which makes them determined to live here, to improve the people, and to prevent the repetition of such a scene."

We stayed several days on Cruna Island, the guests of the master and his wife. We fished his rivers, shot over his land, and altogether managed to get some of the best sport we had had for months. But at last the visit terminated, and the day of our departure really arrived.

In our little craft was stowed away most of the game, and a couple of the salmon we had killed, and which they insisted upon our taking.

Kathleen was loaded with presents for

the girls who had remained at home, while I had been forced to accept one of Dunroon's most valuable dogs. Altogether the leave-taking was affecting, and we were overwhelmed with invitations to come again.

We had intended to leave pretty early, but the leave-taking and the gathering together of the presents had so delayed us, that ere we finally pushed off, and took a last farewell of Cruna, the day was well nigh spent.

There was a fair breeze blowing, so we put up the sail, and the *Ariel*, bending slightly to one side, sped onward like a bird. We looked back, my uncle and I waved our hats, the girls their handkerchiefs, for there, on the beach, stood Dunroon and his wife; they had accompanied

us down to the beach, and they now stood watching our boat as it sped out to sea.

We sailed right across, but when we reached the other side the sail had to come down, and the men took to their oars again. By this time it was twilight. The silence of night had fallen on land and sea; the wild cry of the sea-birds rang with strange echoes through the night. The lofty cliffs, magnified by the dim light, towered up above the glassy waters, which washed unceasingly about their feet, while the heavens were sparkling in all their starry radiance. Ever and anon, as we glided by the crags, we were startled by a great flutter of wings, and some frightened sea-bird, awakened from its slumbers by the splashing of the oars, passed so close

to me, that his wings almost brushed my cheek, and his shrill cries resounded with strange echoes through the night, as he faded slowly away.

When we leapt on to the shore at Storport it was quite dark; we were rather tired, and anxious to get back to the cosy comfort of the Lodge. We were soon ready to depart; my uncle had given his instructions to the boatmen, and I had managed to get possession of Oona's hand, when suddenly we were arrested.

Kathleen was accosted by an old man, who implored her to go with him to see his daughter, who was sick. Kathleen must go at once, or the woman might die before she could reach the house.

Kathleen did not hesitate—she was well used to such demands. She paused for a

moment, to give some instructions to Nora and Oona, then she turned to follow the man alone.

This I would not permit. In spite of her protestations, I insisted upon accompanying her; so, after impressing upon the girls to be sure and have a substantial meal ready for us when we got back, we walked off together in the old man's wake.

We followed him for about a mile over the hills, stumbling through the darkness, and tumbling in and out of miserable bog-holes, until we stood before a low thatched hut, surrounded with filth.

When we entered, the smoke was so thick that I could see nothing, but I heard the grunting of pigs, the babbling of old hags, and the moans of the sick

woman, and next I was startled by the lowing of a cow, which was standing close to my side. The smell which met us was so offensive that I saw Kathleen pause and turn, as if about to rush again into the open air; but remembering, doubtless, the poor woman who was lying helplessly there, and to whom she might be of some service, she strengthened up her failing spirit, and took her stand. By-and-by the smoke cleared, and we could distinctly see all the objects in the room.

In a corner stood a dilapidated four-post bedstead, which, to my astonishment, was unoccupied; but on the floor, before the fire, was strewn a little straw, and upon that lay the sick woman, looking pale as death, and uttering feeble moans. Around her squatted the hags,

some on the floor, some on benches, and one was actually sitting upon the upturned black cauldron. They were most of them smoking, some were profusely weeping, and all were waiting for the sufferer to die, without lifting a finger either to try and save her or to alleviate her sufferings in any way. At the time this amazed me, but I have since learned that it is the true Connaught mode. When a woman is taken ill, she does not say, "Send for the doctor," or ask for help; her exclamation is, "I'm done — send for the priest," and she tries to compose herself for death. Sometimes, by a miracle, she recovers, but more frequently she dies.

Behind the invalid stood a group of men, commenting in audible whispers upon her ghastly look, and the certainty of her

death; all of which remarks were followed by feeble moans from the sufferer.

When Kathleen approached, the woman raised her eyes, and fixed them pitifully upon her face, and the women, with a wild gabble of Irish, which I supposed must be words of welcome, made way for her. She bent over the sufferer, then I saw her rise and draw back, the smell was so great as to be too much even for her. The rags with which the sufferer was clothed, and the rags which were thrown over her, were positively decayed with filth.

Kathleen spoke rapidly to the men in Irish, and they shuffled out of the house; after a deal of rapid talking, she induced half the crowd of old women to follow them; then she turned to me.

"Jack," she said, "do you still persist in waiting for me? If so, I must get you either to step into a little room over there, where the horse is stabled, or wait outside. I must make them wash the poor creature, and put her into bed, before I can do anything; the stench is frightful."

I again expressed my determination to wait for her, and elected to do so in the open air. I took a cigar from my pocket, lit it with a burning sod from the hearth, and stepped at once outside the cabin.

As I walked up and down in the darkness, I could not help thinking of my cousin, and the kind of life which she had set herself to lead. I could not but admire Kathleen, for I knew what she had to endure. The cause of half the diseases in the village, was the dirt and filth in

which the people lived. Soap and water and clean linen were Kathleen's principal remedies, and in most cases they were marvellously successful.

The ignorance of the people is pitiful; more than half the population of the village are unable to read a single sentence or form a letter. But they do not regret. They are not ambitious; they are content to live as their fathers did before them,—to cut and gather turf, and to cultivate a small piece of ground which is rented with each hut. The spirit of enterprise never once rises in their dull and listless dispositions. They plod through their lives without the slightest variation or enlightenment, and they quietly fall to sleep, leaving their children to pursue the same course after them.

Yet, with all their faults, they are very generous and kind-hearted. The stranger is ever made welcome to their hearth and board, and if they receive a kindness, however slight, they always endeavour to make ample return.

The only little bit of deception in which they indulge is the making of *Potheen*, or mountain-dew. Although there is in the village a barrack full of military-looking policemen, and despite the fact that several illicit stills are yearly found and seized, and their owners compelled to pay the heavy fine of six pounds, the authorities have not been able to stop the sale or manufacture of this contraband article. But the fluid is not *traded* in to any great extent; it is made principally for home use, to keep out the cold in the winter

time, when the snow is thickly covering the frozen ground, and the cold, north wind is blowing in from the storm-tossed sea. Poor, half-frozen creatures! what would life be worth to them without this one comfort? It is the delight, the excitement, and the only one luxury of their lives. A solitary people in a solitary waste, living with their pigs and cattle in wretched little mud-huts, their only clothing a few dirty rags, and their only food potatoes; who could deny them this?

My reflections were brought to an end by the sudden appearance of a cauliagh, who invited me to re-enter the cabin. I did so, and found matters considerably improved. The sick woman, clean and comfortably clothed, was lying now upon the bed in a calm sleep. Kathleen, looking

flushed and somewhat tired, was fastening on her cloak. All her thoughts, as usual, were for some one else.

"You must be tired, Jack," she said; "have a glass of something before we start, —there's plenty of potheen, and milk, too, in the house;" and the old man who had brought us thither added his entreaties, but I refused. In truth, I was anxious that Kathleen should get back. She turned to the old man again,—

"Follow us down as soon as you like," she said; "I shall prepare your basket as soon as I get home." Then she took my arm, and we departed.

When we reached the Lodge, a very different picture awaited us. In the dining-room a bright fire filled the grate, and about a dozen candles were burning. My

uncle was in his easy-chair, quietly enjoying his pipe, and watching Amy, who, kneeling on the hearth, was trying to make Nero give my dog a welcome. Oona, clad again in her favourite white, was seated at the piano, playing some tender Irish airs; while Nora, with the others kneeling before her, was exhibiting the presents which had been sent by the mistress of Cruna. The table was spread for a good dinner.

The girls welcomed us with a cry of delight, for two of them, at least, were hungry, and eager to begin. But, although Kathleen was tired to death, her first care was to prepare the basket of necessaries which she had promised to send up to the sick woman.

This done, we were at liberty to enjoy ourselves.

Our meal over, I lit my cigar, and some of us strolled to the kitchen to have a chat with the men, who we believed must by this time have finished their meal, and be enjoying their pipes by the fire. Our imaginary picture had been partly right, but it remained for our eyes to complete it. The men had finished their meal, lit up their pipes, and were seated around the fire; but their eyes were fixed with strange intensity upon a figure—no other, indeed, than Conolly, who, paper in hand, was reading, with an evident sense of enjoyment, an account of a double murder which had recently been committed. He was greatly excited, for his hands and voice both trembled, as he exclaimed, in conclusion,—

"They both fell dead—stone dead—

and I say, more power to the hand that done it!"

"Conolly, you blackguard!" shouted my uncle, who stood at the kitchen door, "put that paper in the fire!"

He dropped the paper and looked up, and I saw at once that something was wrong. He had been drinking. There was a wandering light in his eyes, his jaw was set, and instead of the usual smile of infantine mildness, his face wore a look of sullen and fixed resolve. Was this Conolly? I could hardly believe it—the change was so complete.

"Do you hear what I say, Conolly?" repeated my uncle; "put that paper in the fire!"

"What way, yer honor?" answered the man, still grasping the paper firmly in

his hand; "what harm can the paper do entirely?"

"Not much of itself, but a good deal if left with you. Listen to me, Conolly, I won't have you coming here and corrupting the boys and girls with your lawless talk and lawless ways. I won't have you read to them all the accounts of these crimes which are a disgrace to Ireland."

"A disgrace to Ireland," said Conolly quietly; "sure, yer honor, them's not the only crimes that's a disgrace to the land!"

"What do you mean?"

"Just this, sor," continued Conolly, who was growing more and more excited, "there be murders and murders. All the world knows that for years the poor Irishman has been crushed like a beast

beneath the cruel foot of the landlord—he's had to feel the pinch of starvation, and see his children die all round him for lack of food; he's had to be turned out of the house that has sheltered him since he was born, and maybe to die in the ditch like a dog. Well, the world says nothing to all this; but when some poor devil, in self-defence, strikes at the tyrant that has been crushing him into his grave, the world calls out and says it's murder, and thirsts for the poor cratur's blood."

"And so it is murder!" said my uncle.

"You think so, yer honor? Well, I don't. I call it *justice;* and when I hear that another tyrant is down, I say, 'Praise be to God, more power to the hand that done it!'"

"More shame for you. If a man won't

pay his rent he ought to be turned out."

"Sure 'tisn't always that he won't; sometimes he can't," said Conolly; "and as to the turning out, yer honor didn't say the likes o' that when Mr O'Neil—God blasht his soul!—turned me out of house and home that winter when I was down with the fever. He refused to give me bite or sup, and told me if I didn't choose to go to the workhouse I might die in the road; but 'twas yer honor that took me in, and gave me work, and kept me from committing murder. I don't forget the man that took me in any more than I forget the one that turned me out."

The speaker was very much excited; his eyes glared and his hand clenched, and, for the first time in his life perhaps, he

looked really capable of bloodshed. My uncle evidently saw this, for he turned the conversation to other themes.

"Well," he said, "I'm too tired to discuss these questions to-night, Conolly; besides, I didn't come to the kitchen for that, but to ask you if you could manage to sleep here to-night?"

"Is it to-night, yer honor?" said Conolly quietly, and looking decidedly uncomfortable. He evidently didn't like to refuse my uncle, and yet we could see he had made other plans. My uncle seeing this, grew firmer in his resolve.

"It's the first favour you've ever done me, and maybe it'll be the last. Will ye sleep here to-night or not, Conolly. Yes or no?"

After a good deal of hesitation Conolly

consented to remain. Then my uncle added carelessly,—

"By the way, Conolly, will ye lend me the paper a bit? I should like to read the news."

And Conolly having reluctantly handed it over, we returned to the dining-room to smoke our last pipe before going to bed.

"I'm afraid," he said, "poor Conolly will get himself into trouble some day. Whenever he gets a drop of drink it's the old cry—down with tyrants in general, and one tyrant in particular. I wouldn't have given much for O'Neil's life if he'd met Conolly on a dark road to-night."

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